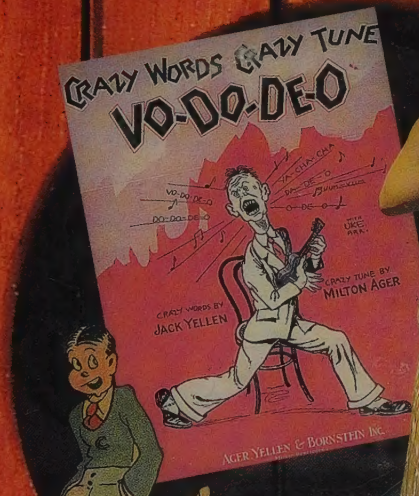
The UKULELE

A Visual History



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The Vintage Guitar
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The UKULELE

A Visual History

BY

JIM BELOFF

Art Direction & Design
by TOMMY STEELE & ANDY ENGEL

Edited by RONNY S. SCHIFF

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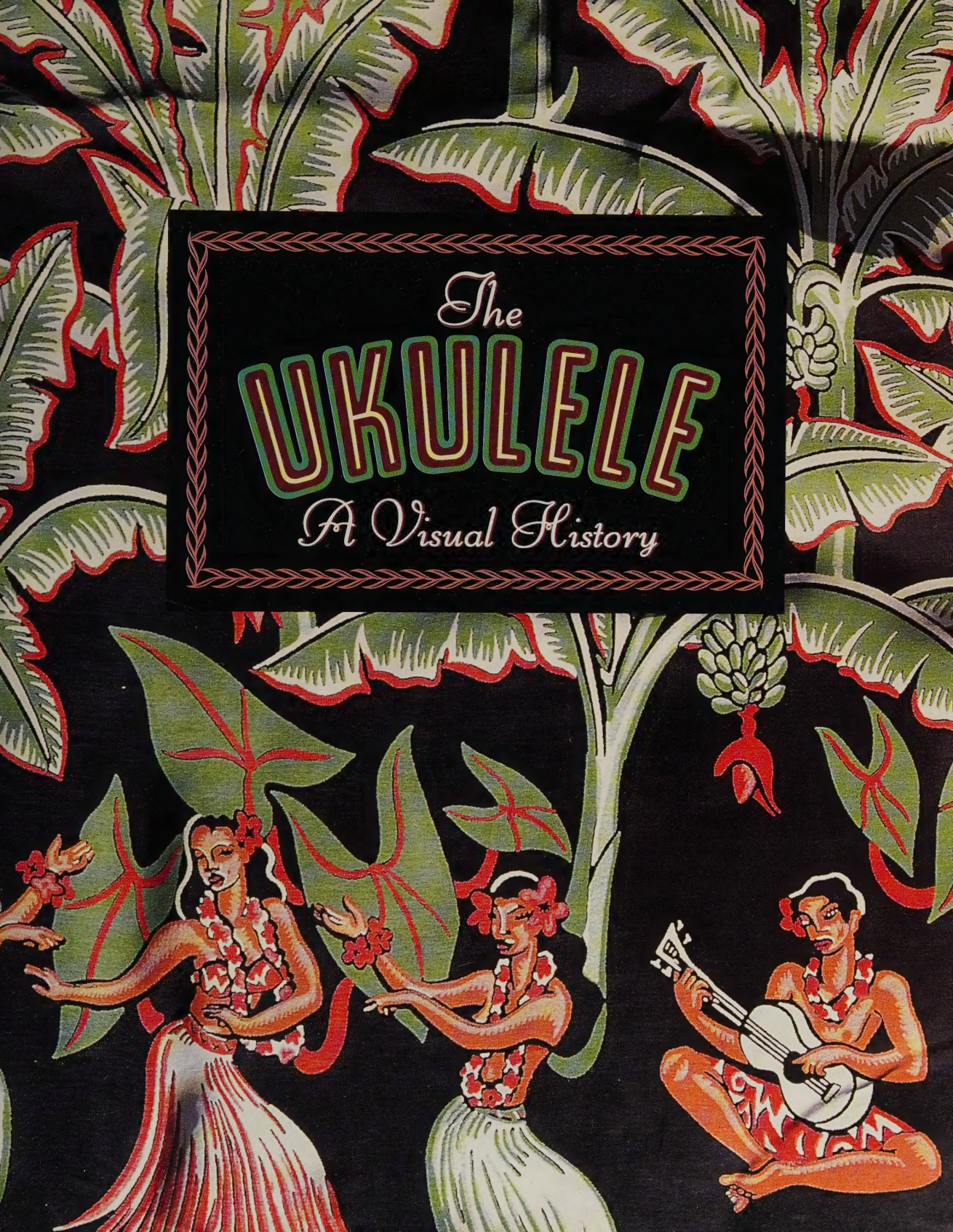
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A Visual History

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Introduction

About five years ago, I stumbled upon a musical instrument that since then has changed my life. At the famous Rose Bowl Flea Market in Pasadena, California, I bought an old Martin tenor ukulele. While I had been playing guitar for almost thirty years, something about the uke made me an almost instant convert. Unquestionably, the size and portability had something to do with it. As someone who travels a great deal for work, the uke became an easy-to-take-along musical companion.

But there were other reasons why this instrument called to me. One was that as a songwriter, delighted and inspired by the great songs of Tin Pan Alley, I found the uke to be a more appropriate instrument for my songs than the more contemporary "singer-songwriterish" guitar. Another reason was the challenge of arranging around four strings instead of six. Rather than feeling limited by this arrangement, I looked at the uke as the musical instrument equivalent of a barbershop quartet. Thinking of the four strings as four individual voices, I became a big admirer of good uke arranging or "chord soloing" and went on to try this kind of arranging for myself.

In the five years since I found my first uke, I've published two songbooks for the uke—*Jumpin' Jim's Ukulele Favorites, Jumpin' Jim's Ukulele Gems*—and one method book—*Jumpin' Jim's Ukulele Tips 'n' Tunes*. All three are published by Flea Market Music, Inc. and distributed by Hal Leonard Publications. I've also released a CD of original songs performed on the ukulele entitled *Jim's Dog Has Fleas. The Ukulele—A Visual History* is a natural extension of a passion that, so far, knows no bounds.

As always, I'd love to hear from you. If you have any suggestions for future editions, drop me a line...

FLEA MARKET
MUSIC, INC.
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STUDIO CITY,
CALIFORNIA 91614

Thanks,

Jim Beloff

THE FOUR DIFFERENT SIZES OF UKE.
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: SOPRANO, CONCERT, TENOR, BARITONE.
THE SOPRANO IS BY FAR AND AWAY THE MOST COMMON SIZE. THE CONCERT IS THE RAREST. THE BARITONE IS TUNED EXACTLY LIKE THE TOP FOUR STRINGS OF A GUITAR (E B G D). THE SOPRANO, CONCERT AND TENOR ARE USUALLY TUNED, G C E A, WITH THE G AN OCTAVE UP, RESULTING IN THE FAMOUS "MY DOG HAS FLEAS" TUNING.
PHOTO BY ELIZABETH MAIHOCK BELOFF.

foreword

Thanksgiving 1995 will be remembered as a high-water mark in the ongoing history of the ukulele. During the three-night television broadcast of *The Beatles Anthology* documentary, the ukulele received an unusual amount of visibility. Paul McCartney referred to John Lennon's mom, who played the uke, and offered that "to this day, if I ever meet grownups who play ukuleles, I love 'em." Later on, George Harrison is shown playing "I Will" on a uke as well as a never-recorded tune. All of this attention coming from a musical group who made every kid in the world want to play the guitar. Could it be possible that, somehow, the ukulele was "cool" again?

For many of its fans, the ukulele has never been out of style. For players and collectors it is the subject of great passion. The inspiration behind this particular homage to the ukulele is twofold: As a uke collector, the first is a desire to have a comprehensive collection of photographs of the finest ukuleles ever made, as well as many examples of the great novelty ukes. The other driving force behind this book is simply that there hasn't been anything like it available to this day. With that in mind, this book is an attempt to pull together the whole story of the ukulele. Inside you will find the history of the uke, its most noteworthy players and personalities, the great manufacturers and a look at the current uke scene. What follows is truly a labor of love. If you have as much fun reading through this book as I had putting it together, I will consider it a job well done.

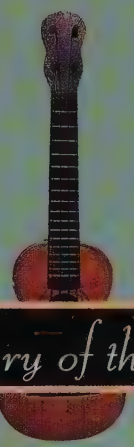
John Lennon and George Harrison in Waikiki.
From the collection of DeSoto Brown.

CHAPTER ONE

The Birth—A Gift from Portugal

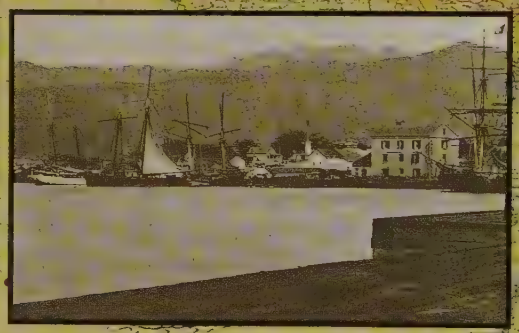
The ukulele is actually the descendant of a Portuguese musical instrument known as the *braguinha* or, less commonly, *machete de braga*. To this day, this four-stringed instrument is still popular on the Portuguese island of Madeira.

The collision of cultures that created the uke can be traced to the very specific date of August 23rd, 1879. This was the day that the *Ravenscrag*, a ship filled with 419 men, women and children from Madeira, arrived in Hawaii. After a difficult four month voyage, the weary travelers were understandably thrilled to have finally reached their destination. According to legend, upon arriving in Honolulu Harbor, a musician-passenger by the name of Joao Fernandez hopped onto the wharf and began



The History of the Ukulele

Opposite: From the John Kelly Collection at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, Honolulu, Hawaii. Used by permission of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel



BRAGUINHA—THE BODY OF THE BRAGUINHA IS ABOUT 8 INCHES LONG, AND ITS FOUR METAL STRINGS ARE TUNED TO FIFTHS. ONE HAWAIIAN OBSERVER NOTED THAT THE BRAGUINHA RESEMBLED A "PINE BOX WITH SCALE MARKS ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THE HOLE, AND THE TOP LEFT UNPOLISHED."

—

MAP—THE VOYAGE ROUTE FROM MADEIRA, AROUND SOUTH AMERICA TO HAWAII.

—

HONOLULU HARBOR, CIRCA 1881, WITH A SHIP SIMILAR TO THE RAVENSCRAG THAT BROUGHT THE BRAGUINHA TO HAWAII. COURTESY OF THE BISHOP MUSEUM.

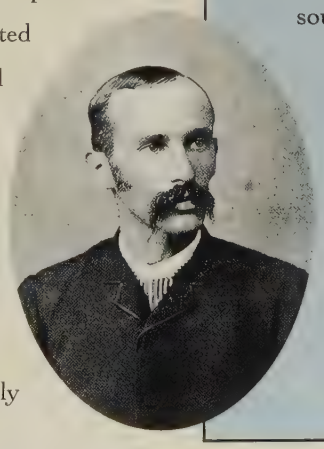
singing Portuguese folksongs of thanksgiving for their safe arrival. Although he was playing chiefly for the benefit of his fellow passengers, the assembled Hawaiians couldn't help but be moved by his performance. They also couldn't help but notice the curious instrument on which he was accompanying himself—a braguinha.

As fate would have it, three men on board the *Ravenscrag*—Augusto Dias, Manuel Nunes and José do Espirito Santo—were talented craftsmen. Manuel Nunes was both an instrument and cabinet maker; José do Espirito Santo and Augusto Dias were both craftsmen and talented musicians. These three men would soon play a role in the development and popularization of the modern-day ukulele.

The Jumping Flea

There are many theories about how the ukulele got its name. The two most-circulated stories include one about an English army officer, Edward Purvis, who arrived in Hawaii in 1879. Purvis was a talented musician who became quite adept at playing the braguinha, and after being appointed Assistant Chamberlain to the court of King David Kalakaua, often entertained the court with his expert playing. Because he was small and sprightly (as opposed to the markedly larger frames of the Hawaiians), he was nicknamed "Ukulele," which in Hawaiian means "jumping flea" (also translated as "bouncing flea" and "leaping flea"). One theory suggests that Purvis' nickname simply spread to the instrument he loved to play.

A more literal theory likens the fingers of an accomplished player flying nimbly up and down the



EDWARD PURVIS (CIRCA 1880), THE ORIGINAL "JUMPING FLEA." PHOTO BY J. WILLIAMS, BISHOP MUSEUM.

A Poor Prophecy

In 1850, a travel writer by the name of John A. Dix wrote a book entitled *A Winter In Madeira and a Summer in Spain and Florence.* In this book, Dix describes the *machete de braga,* the Portuguese ancestor of the ukulele, in this way: "It is an invention of the island, and one of which the island has no great cause to be proud. Its music, by itself, is thin and meagre; but in the streets at night, with a guitar or violincello accompaniment, it is very pretty." Dix goes on to say that despite a few good local *machete* players, he can't help but think how much better they would sound on a guitar—"in all respects a finer instrument." He concludes by saying, "It is not probable that the *machete* will ever emigrate from Madeira." Ouch!

How Do You Spell It?

The subject of this book has appeared in print with at least three known variations. The most common and preferred spelling is *ukulele*. This is also the exact composite of the two Hawaiian words that created it: *'uku*—flea; *lele*—to jump. Another spelling is *ukelele*. This variation may have originated from the combination of *'uke*, as a form of *'ukeke*, the ancient Hawaiian two- or three-stringed musical instrument (not unlike a Jew's harp), and, once again, the jumping *lele*. Another possibility for the second spelling is the confusion created as a result of the spelling of the shortened form of *uke*. Finally, the word appears as *ukalele* in the titles of two pieces of sheet music from 1915 and 1916—"When Old Bill Bailey Plays The Ukalele" and "That Ukalele Band."

fretboard of the braguinha to the movement of "jumping fleas." Queen Lili'uokalani didn't care for this interpretation. She preferred a more poetic translation of the Hawaiian word *uku* as "the gift" and *lele* "to come," referring to the way in which this now-cherished instrument had come from Portugal to Hawaii (obviously the Hawaiian word "uku" has multiple meanings).

While there are many possible explanations as to the genesis of the ukulele's name, it is important to note that there is only one correct pronunciation in Hawaii: "oo-koo-le-le," which is in marked contrast to the way the "you-koo-le-le" is commonly pronounced on the Mainland.

The Ukulele Comes of Age

Although responding to a call for workers in Hawaii's sugar plantations, Augusto Dias expected to find employment in the woodworking industry. Like Fernandez, Dias was also a fine musician and reportedly passed the time on the *Ravenscrag* playing the guitar and singing. When Dias arrived in Honolulu in August of 1879, he was crushed to learn that most of the men from the ship were engaged as laborers in the fields. At ten dollars per month, Dias worked hard enough to pay off the year-long contract three months early.

With interest growing in the braguinha/ukulele, and no one in Honolulu to build them at the time, a real market opportunity presented itself. In 1880, Manuel Nunes was the first to open his own shop in the "Independent Manufacture and Sale of Ukuleles." According to Leslie Nunes, great-grandson of Manuel and long-time ukulele historian, both Dias and Santo worked for some time under Nunes' employ. Eventually Dias split off from Nunes and by 1884 had his own instrument-making and repair shop on King Street in Honolulu. By 1888, Santo,

too, had opened his own guitar and ukulele shop.

While there is more about Dias, the ukulele maker, in *The Great Ukulele Manufacturers* chapter, Dias the musician developed a long-standing relationship with King Kalakaua. Engaged regularly to perform at social functions at Iolani Palace, Dias would demonstrate his unique Spanish style of picking the melody, as opposed to using the instrument to just strum the chords. The King also held weekly poker parties where notables such as Robert Louis Stevenson would play his flute and Dias would play the uke.

ABOVE: AUGUSTO DIAS
(COURTESY OF ELMA T. CABRAL)
ABOVE LEFT: MANUEL NUNES
(COURTESY OF LESLIE NUNES)
TWO OF THE THREE MADEIRAN MEN WHO ARE CONSIDERED THE EARLY DEVELOPERS OF THE UKULELE.

—

CENTER: SANTO UKE.
(COURTESY OF BILLY D. VOIERS),
PHOTO BY
ELIZABETH MAIHOCK BELOFF

—

FAR LEFT: A UKULELE MADE BY
AUGUSTO DIAS (1842-1915)

The Ukulele Finds a Patron

A key reason for the rapid acceptance of the ukulele was due to the patronage of Hawaii's "Merry Monarch," King David Kalakaua. His is an essential part of the story, not only because of the influence that he wielded, but also because he was a composer who happened to love to play the ukulele.

KING DAVID KALAKAUA (1836-1891) ENTERTAINED MANY DISTINGUISHED VISITORS, INCLUDING ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, CENTER. COURTESY OF *PARADISE OF THE PACIFIC*.

As a child, along with his brother and two sisters, Kalakaua was adopted by various members of the High Chief's family. From his grandmother he learned about the ancient Hawaiian music, and he learned about contemporary music through his teachers at the Royal School. He played piano, accordion, guitar and later, of course, the ukulele. David and his two sisters, the future Queen Lili'uokalani, Princess Likelike and his brother Prince Leleiohoku all became known as songwriters and all played the ukulele. Their talents, in fact, created a certain competitive spirit between them, leading to regular songwriting contests.

At the time of the braguinha's arrival, the royal family's Iolani Palace was the nexus of Hawaiian dance, music and culture. The King's influence was such that after he learned to play the ukulele, he added a lilting rhythm to the traditional hula. His interest in this musical instrument was so profound that he even learned to design and build his own ukuleles from Augusto Dias.

Because the ukulele became King Kalakaua's favorite instrument, he made every effort to include it in all of his musical activities. During the King's Jubilee celebration in 1886, the ukulele accompanied the hula dances for the first time. Thanks again to the King's patronage, the ukulele began to be a featured part of the instrumental ensembles of the leading glee clubs, and it was even written into the music of the royal composers.

While the enthusiasm of the royal family had a lot to do with the acceptance of the uke, it wasn't the whole story. The flames were also fanned by the fact that, in its redesign, the braguinha had become the easier-to-play ukulele. Nunes is credited with these changes. Some of his refinements included increasing the size and altering the shape slightly, replacing the metal strings with "catgut" (sheep gut), and changing the tuning to allow for easier chord formation.

QUEEN LILI'UOKALANI, COMPOSER OF "ALOHA OE," ALSO PLAYED THE UKULELE.

Between the years of 1880 and 1915, most ukulele-related activity was occurring in Hawaii. Nonetheless, as early as 1890, the ukulele was beginning to show up in various major cities on the Mainland.

From Hawaii With Love

The seeds of the Hawaiian tourism industry were sown as early as the 1880s, even before a group of businessmen overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893. Soon after, in 1900, Hawaii was admitted as a U.S. territory, and the Merchants Association of Hawaii was already looking seriously at ways to encourage visitors to the islands. In addition to the extraordinary beauty of their home, these early promoters were well aware of the powerful drawing power of Hawaiian dance and music. Symbolically, the bewitching maiden in a grass skirt and lei, strumming a ukulele, covered a lot of ground. Add a moonlit sandy beach and you have the best example of a picture being worth a thousand words. In years to come, that image would become a part of American pop culture.

In 1901, The Hawaiian Glee Club took four ukuleles on its tour of several big Mainland cities as part of its ten-piece, back-up band. In particular, the Glee Club played the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. It wasn't until 1915, however, that the ukulele really hit big in the Mainland. This was the year that the Panama-Pacific International Exposition was held in San Francisco. In celebration of the completion of the Panama Canal, the Exposition offered Hawaii the opportunity to promote its products, land and people. With a $100,000 appropriation, the Hawaiian legislature approved the building of the Hawaii Pavilion. One of the most popular attractions, the Hawaii Pavilion offered several shows a day featuring hulas and songs. The exposure of the ukulele during these shows gave many of the 17 million people who came to the Exposition a serious itch for the "jumping flea."

The Beginning of a Craze

One of the many performers at the exposition was Henry Kailimai, composer of "On The Beach At Waikiki." This song was important because it became one of the best known *hapa-haole* songs of the time. *Hapa-haole* (literal translation "half white") usually referred to someone who was of a mixed Hawaiian-Caucasian heritage. As a song, it meant that the lyrics were primarily in English, but with a few Hawaiian words thrown in (*hapa-haole* can also refer to a song where all the lyrics are in Hawaiian, the tune an original Hawaiian melody, but the arrangement is contemporized according to the prevailing sounds coming from the Mainland). Kailimai's song was also important because he played it on a ukulele.

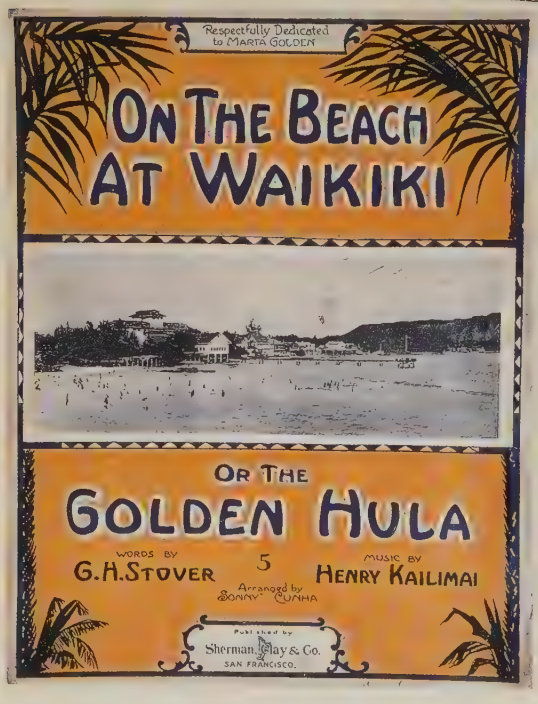
Thanks to the powerful combination of the

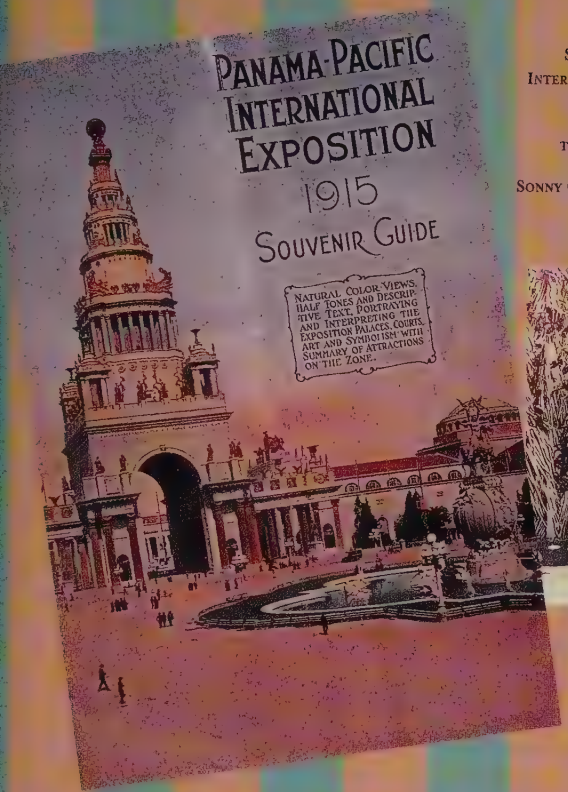
allure of the islands, the hula dancers and Kailimai's performance, the Hawaiian craze was ignited, and the ukulele fad was born. Suddenly, it seemed that everyone wanted to play the uke. Music studios gave lessons, while department stores offered them for free with the purchase of a ukulele.

Immediately, Tin Pan Alley songwriters were writing dozens of Hawaiian novelty songs like "Hello, Hawaii, How are You?"; record companies were releasing a flood of Hawaiian records and several Mainland musical instrument makers began knocking out inexpensive ukuleles, barely keeping up with demand. The effort to sell Hawaii and its culture was perhaps too successful. In some cases the Mainland makers were even identifying their ukes as "Made in Hawaii." This was particularly galling to the Hawaii Chamber Of Commerce, who had invested heavily to promote their own manufacturers.

Not all of the Mainland ukuleles were cheap imitations. As early as 1916, celebrated musical instrument makers such as C.F. Martin of Nazareth, Pennsylvania began making fine ukuleles. (More information on the great Hawaiian and Mainland manufacturers can be found in *The Great Ukulele Manufacturers* chapter).

The Hawaiian craze that flowed in the late teens began to ebb in the 1920s. However, the uke was firmly established as part of twenties music (see "Cliff Edwards" in *The Great Players and Personalities* chapter). With the onset of big band music, interest in the uke began to wane by the thirties. Although the ukulele never came back into vogue to the same degree, it did enjoy a renaissance in the late forties and early fifties through the television presence of baritone uke player Arthur Godfrey. At the same time, famous guitar designer Mario Maccaferri manufactured and sold over nine million plastic ukuleles. Amazingly, they had quite a nice tone and were easy to play. Despite the fact that so many were made, very few turn up today. This is due probably to their being thought of as disposable "toys" in their time.





Souvenir program of the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, California.

—

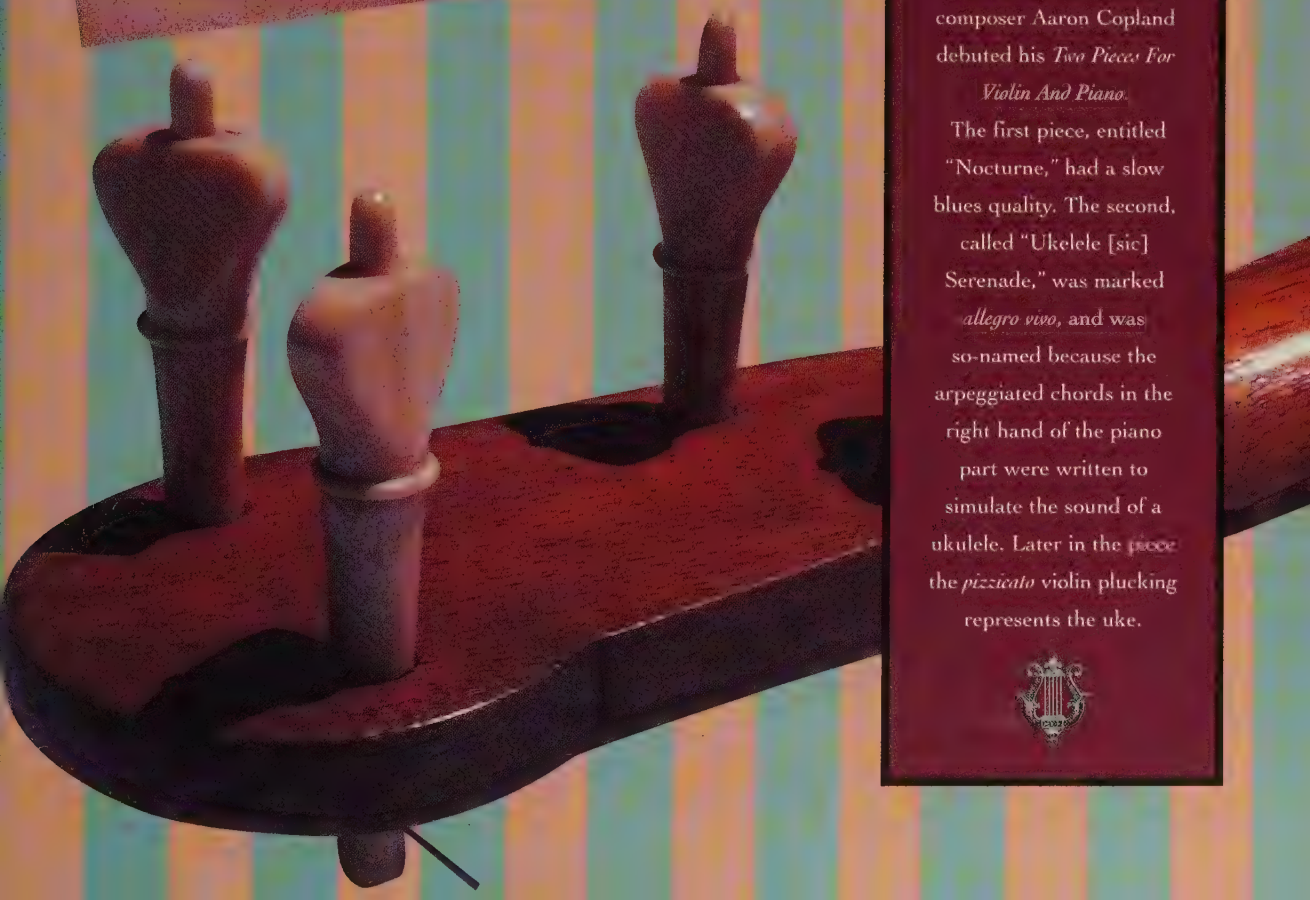
The Royal Hawaiian Quartette playing at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition .

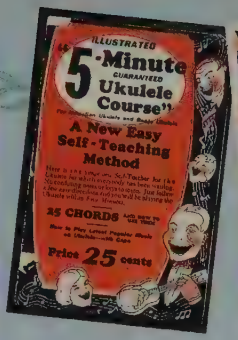
—

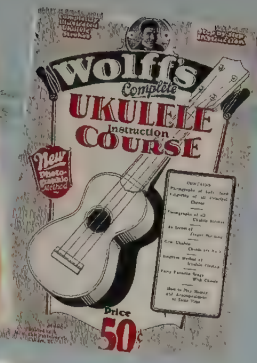
Sonny Cunha-The great *hapa-haole* singer and songwriter. Courtesy of Rick Cunha.

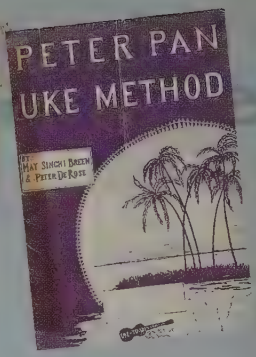
The Classical Uke

On February 13, 1927, the famous American composer Aaron Copland debuted his *Two Pieces For Violin And Piano*. The first piece, entitled "Nocturne," had a slow blues quality. The second, called "Ukelele [sic] Serenade," was marked *allegro vivo*, and was so-named because the arpeggiated chords in the right hand of the piano part were written to simulate the sound of a ukulele. Later in the piece the *pizzicato* violin plucking represents the uke.









Martin Ukulele Production Totals

In *Martin Guitars, A History*, author Mike Longworth includes Martin's ukulele production totals from 1915 to 1987. The two peak periods can be seen clearly, with high points in 1926 and again in 1950, thanks to Arthur Godfrey.

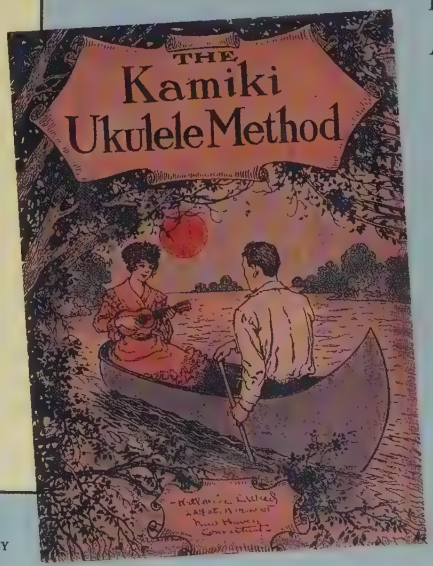
Year	Total
1915	12
1916	1,371
1917	1,988
1918	1,495
1919	3,541
1920	3,165
1921	1,669
1922	4,793
1923	4,785
1924	7,062
1925	10,870
1926	14,101
1927	5,860
1928	3,605
1929	3,349
1930	4,584
1931	2,718
1932	987
1933	737
1934	917
1935	985
1936	1,076
1937	1,436

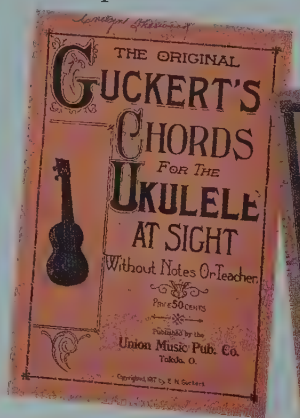
Martin Table of Ukulele Production Numbers. Courtesy of Martin Guitar Company.

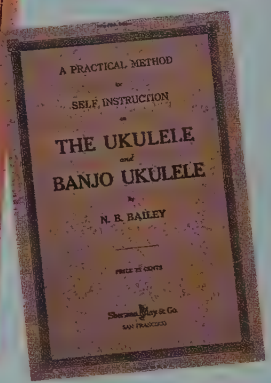
Method To The Madness

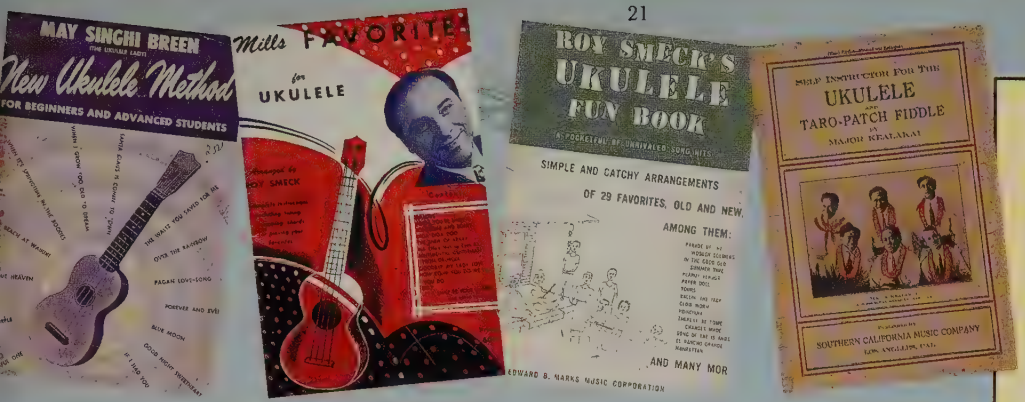
In response to the Mainlander's desire to play the ukulele came a small forest of ukulele how-to-play books. In 1925, M. M. Cole of Chicago published the *5 Minute Guaranteed Ukulele Course*, followed in 1927 by Cole's *New Standard Ukelele Song Book* containing 200 songs with words. The price of each of these books was 25 cents. For 50 cents, Cole published *Wolff's Complete Ukulele Instruction Course* in 1928, including the new "photo-graphic" method showing hands forming chords and making strums on a "Le Domino" uke.

In 1925, May Singhi Breen and her husband Peter DeRose self-published the *Peter Pan Uke Method*. This and Breen's *New Ukulele Method*, published by the Robbins Music Corporation, were two of many Breen-created uke method books. Roy Smeck was another extremely prolific uke book writer. A few of his better known uke books include *New Original Ukulele Method* published by Alex H. Kolbe in 1928; the Smeck-arranged *Irving Berlin Songs*, published by the Irving Berlin Music Corporation in 1950; and Roy Smeck's *Ukulele Fun Book*, published in 1950 by the Edward J. Marks Corporation.









Here are a number of other better-known uke method/songbooks:

Self Instructor for the Ukulele and Taro-Patch Fiddle, 1912,

by Major Kealakai, published by Southern California Music Company of Los Angeles. Major Kealakai was leader of the Royal Hawaiian Band from 1895 to 1896, "after the old throne" of Queen Lili'uokalani. Major Kealakai was an obvious booster of the uke, maintaining that "the ukulele is played by nearly everyone in Hawaii as well as the entire Pacific Coast. The harmony is there for the most difficult opera written if one would give it a complete and thorough study" and that anyone "can have more pleasure out of a ukulele than any other string instrument."

A Practical Method for Self Instruction on the Ukulele and Banjo Ukulele, 1914,

by N.B. Bailey, published by Sherman, Clay & Company. A very early method book wherein the author states that "Unless accompanied by the Ukulele, the native Hula and Luau dances would be like meat without salt."

The Kamiki Ukulele Method, 1917,

published by Wm. J. Smith & Co. This book featured a beautiful two-color illustration of a man and a woman in a canoe on the cover; he is paddling and she is strumming.

The Original Guckert's Chords for the Ukulele at Sight (Without Notes or Teacher), 1917,

by E. N. Guckert, published by the Union Music Publishing Company. This book promises that "Nothing necessary to completeness has been omitted or has any useless matter been added to make this a large book."

Sam Fox Modern Method for the Ukulele and Banjo Ukulele, 1919,

by H. Kahanamo. Another very early method book.

Elite Method for the Ukulele, 1919,

by Arling Shaeffer, published by Lyon and Healy. Large-size book featuring uke tablature and original songs by Mr. Shaeffer.

EZ Method for Ukulele and Ukulele Banjo, 1924.

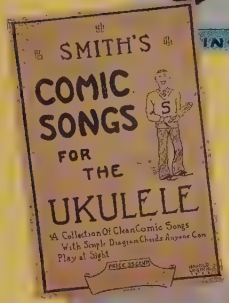
Another Wm. J. Smith book that contains "just the necessary material for learning to play" the ukulele, tiple, uke-i-tar, guitar-uke and taro-patch.

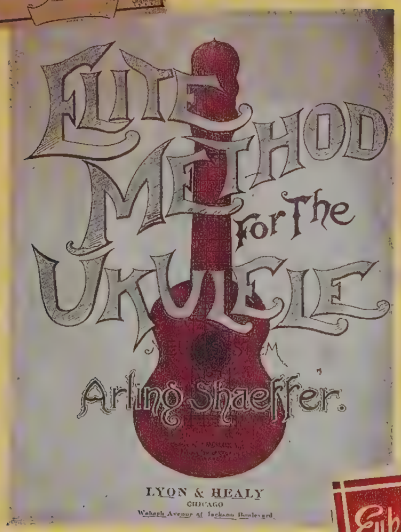
Smith's Comic Songs for the Ukulele, 1923,

published by Wm. J. Smith Music Co. Inc. Featured many fractured songs and parodies written by Wm. J. Smith or in some cases Smill Bith. Includes "My Ukulele Queen."

Year	Total
1938	1,144
1939	862
1940	917
1941	1,443
1942	2,143
1943	8,163
1944	3,003
1945	2,495
1946	4,231
1947	1,567
1948	3,041
1949	8,076
1950	11,722
1951	6,214
1952	4,532
1953	4,901
1954	4,508
1955	3,848
1956	4,238
1957	3,900
1958	3,691
1959	5,356
1960	4,354
1961	5,126
1962	4,245
1963	4,319
1964	4,488
1965	2,801
1966	1,496
1967	1,425
1968	75
1969	111
1970	311
1971	512

The above totals are a combination of production figures and sales totals. Since the total sales and total manufactured are closely related, the above numbers are sufficient to establish Uke trends.



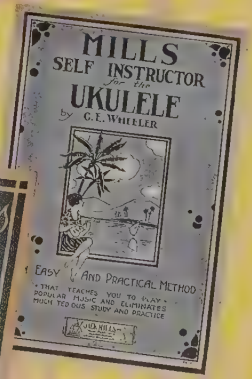


"Hank's" Book of Eukadidles for the Ukulele, 1923,
by "Hank" Linet, published by Jack Mills Inc. Two volumes of ukulele "ditties" featuring the approved "Played-on-Sight" Ukulele Chord System.

Mills Self Instructor for the Ukulele, 1924,
by C.E. Wheeler, published by Jack Mills Inc. *Courtesy of Warner Bros. Publications.*

Paul Summers Instructor—Ukulele and Guitar, 1932,
published by Paul Summers. Includes the phone number of Summers' studio in Honolulu.

Ukulele Ike Collection for the Ukulele, Volumes 1-3, 1949,
by Ukulele Ike (Cliff Edwards), published by Robbins Music Corporation. These three songbooks (each with the same cover in a different color, in order—red, blue and green) feature many big hits of the day with uke chord frames throughout.
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Publications.



Famous Collection for the Ukulele, Arranged by Wendell Hall, 1950,
published by Famous Music. This book introduced the reader to "The Small Guitars of 1950," including the slightly-larger-than-the-uke but smaller-than-the-guitar Teeviola and Taraguitar.
Courtesy of Famous Music Corporation.

Everybody's Favorite Songs for Ukulele.
Courtesy of Music Sales Corporation.

Let's Play the Uke, 1959,
by Harry Reser, published by MPH. One of the best-selling "how-to" books of its day.

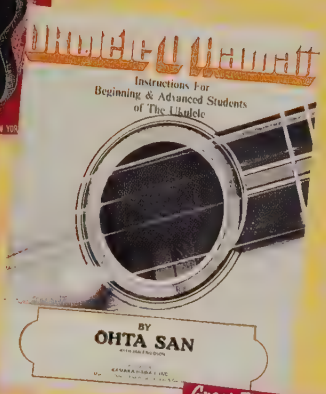
Mel Bay's Fun with the Ukulele, 1961,
by Mel Bay, published by Mel Bay Publications. One of a multitude of how-to books from one of the greatest how-to companies.

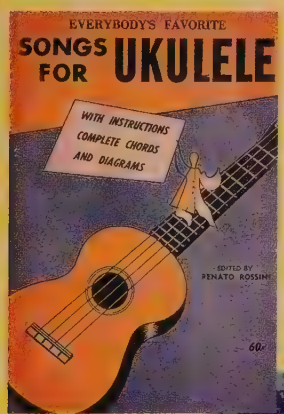
Ukulele O Hawaii, 1973,
by Ohta-San, published by Kamaka Hawaii, Inc. A collaboration between one of the greatest players of all time with one of the greatest Hawaiian uke makers.
Courtesy of Kamaka Hawaii, Inc.

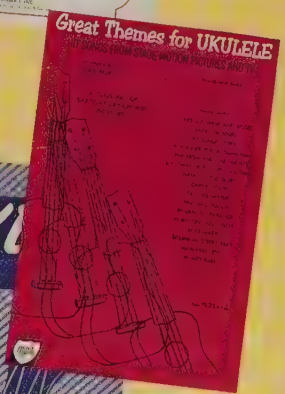
Happy Time Ukulele Method and Song Book, 1987,
by Buddy Griffin, published by Happy Time, Inc. According to "Smiley," the book's mascot, smiling while strumming "it's just the natural thing to do!"

It's interesting to note that the publication of uke method and songbooks followed two distinct eras: The first occurring during the golden age of the teens and twenties, and then, again, the second right at the peak of Arthur Godfrey's popularity in the early 1950s. Also there were at least two attempts to sell a uke instruction course with a recording. One, by May Singhi Breen, was called *A Six-Minute Course on How to Play the Ukulele*, with Victor Record No.19740. Another, *R&M's Recorded Ukulele Course* by Jerry Oddo, was a record/book combo that promised to bring "the instructor into your home."

Other publishers who jumped on the uke-book bandwagon include Chas. H. Hansen with *Simplified Popular Song Hits for Ukulele*, and M. Witmark & Sons' *Great Themes for Ukulele—Hit Songs from Stage, Motion Pictures and TV*, arranged by Dan Fox and published in 1964.







The Uke and Tin Pan Alley

Tin Pan Alley songwriters in the 1915 to 1930s era, always looking to cater to as wide an audience as possible, jumped head-first into the Hawaiian waters. Whether parodying the Hawaiian language in "Oh, How She Could Yacki Hacki Wicki Wacki Woo" and "Yaaka Hula Hickey Dula," or getting laughs out of funny titles like "They're Wearing 'em Higher in Hawaii," the Tin Pan Alley writers found Hawaii to be a fertile subject for songwriting.

Because the ukulele was synonymous with Hawaii, it is no surprise that the uke was often featured in the lyrics of a lot of these songs and often rhymed with the words "daily" and "gaily." Sometimes the uke even got top billing in the song title. What follows are some uke-centered songs…

***"When Old Bill Bailey Plays The Ukalele,"* 1915;**

words and music by Chas. McCarron and Nat Vincent. Includes the lyric "Bill Bailey won his fame, with his old guitar, ukalele is its name, in that land a far."

***"My Waikiki Ukulele Girl,"* 1916;**

words by Jesse G. M. Glick; music by Chris Smith. "Strum, strum, strum, on your ukulele, pretty baby of the Southern Sea." Ukulele/gaily rhyme.

***"I Can Hear the Ukuleles Calling Me,"* 1916;**

words by Nat Vincent; music by Herman Paley. One of the most beautiful sheet music covers.

***"That Ukalele Band,"* 1916;**

words by Harry Edelheit and Sammy Smith; music by Billy Vanderveer. Note the spelling variation of ukulele. Includes the lyric "That ukalele melody is nice, the music seems to come from Paradise."

***"When They Play the Rosary on the Ukelele,"* 1917;**

words and music by Leonard Brown. Brown (of Lowell, Massachusetts) is also the publisher of this song; his promo lines promise "songs with a punch."

***"Dreamy Paradise,"* 1920;**

words and music by Haven Gillespie, Egbert van Alstyne and Erwin Schmidt. From the collection of DeSoto Brown.

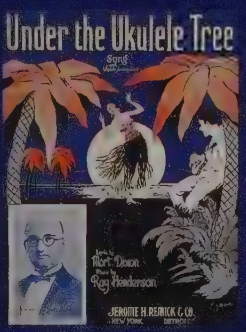
***"Oh, How She Could Play A Ukulele,"* 1926;**

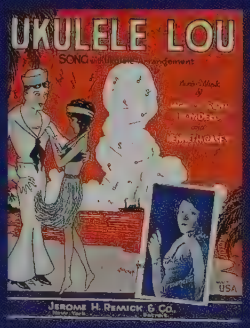
words and music by Benny Davis and Harry Akst.

Courtesy of Bourne Music.

Opposite: detail, *Dreamy Paradise* From the collection of DeSoto Brown

OH HOW SHE COULD PLAY A UKULELE
OH, HOW SHE COULD YACKI HAKI WICKI WACKI WOO!
(THAT'S LOVE IN HONOLU)
THE UKULELE DANCE
I CAN HEAR THE UKULELES CALLING ME
SONG
My Waikiki Ukulele Girl
JESSE G. McCLICK
CHRIS SMITH
LYRIC BY HAVEN GILLESPIE
MUSIC BY EGBERT VAN ALSTYN
Van Alstyne & Curtis





"Silent Ukulele," 1942,
words and music by Harry Owens.
Courtesy of Royal Music Publishing. From the
collection of DeSoto Brown.

"Under the Ukulele Tree," 1926,
words and music by Mort Dixon
and Ray Henderson.
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Music.
From the collection of DeSoto Brown.

"Ukulele Lou," 1924,
words and music
by LeSoir, Dell and Casey.
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Music.
From the collection of DeSoto Brown.

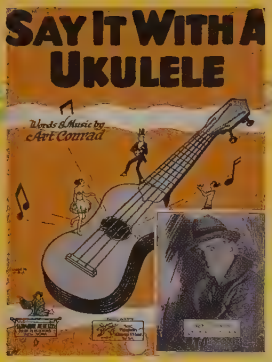
"Ukulele Lou," 1924,
words and music by Andrew Sterling.
From the collection of DeSoto Brown.

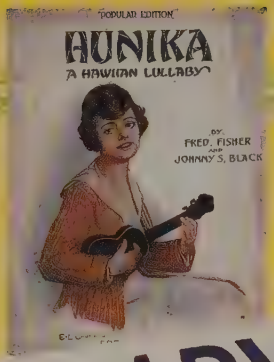
DETAIL RIGHT:
LO, ALOHA! HOW ARE YOU?"

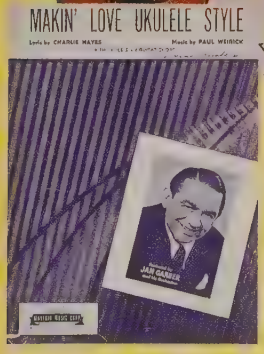
"My Honolulu Ukulele Baby," 1916,
words by Gerald N. Johnson
and music by Henry Kailimai.
From the collection of DeSoto Brown.

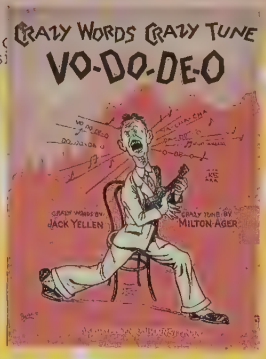
"Ukelele Sweetheart," 1924,
words and music by Jack Murray,
Kenneth Stambaugh and Irving Mills.
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Publications.
From the collection of DeSoto Brown.

"Hello, Aloha!
How Are You?," 1926,
words by L. Wolfe Gilbert;
music by Abel Baer.
This song features the lyric,
"Now I can uke and uke
and uke and uke
and you can uke a ukulele too!"
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Publications









"Say It with a Ukulele," 1923, words and music by Art Conrad. The uke is recommended as the "proper thing to serenade a lady." *Courtesy of Shapiro Bernstein & Co., Inc.*

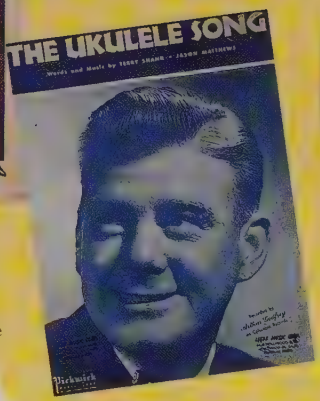
"On My Ukulele," 1924, words and music by Mitchell Parish, Mike Morris and Lou Herscher. Ukulele/gaily rhyme.

"Hunika—A Hawaiian Lullaby," 1920, words and music by Fred Fisher and Johnny S. Black.

"Ukulele Blues," 1924, words and music by Claude Lapham, May Singhi Breen and Samuel Kors. Includes the lyric, "I bought a ukulele and I strummed upon it daily." *Courtesy of E.B. Marks*

"Ukulele Lady," 1925, words by Gus Kahn; music by Richard Whiting. Perhaps the best-known song with ukulele in the title. *Courtesy of Bourne Music.*

"Give Me a Ukelele (And a Ukelele Baby) and Leave the Rest to Me," 1926, words and music by Lew Brown and Gene Williams. Another daily/ukulele rhyme as well as the line "with my little u-kin', you kin leave the rest to me." According to the sheet music cover, the song was "England's Greatest Hit." *Courtesy of Shapiro Bernstein & Co.*

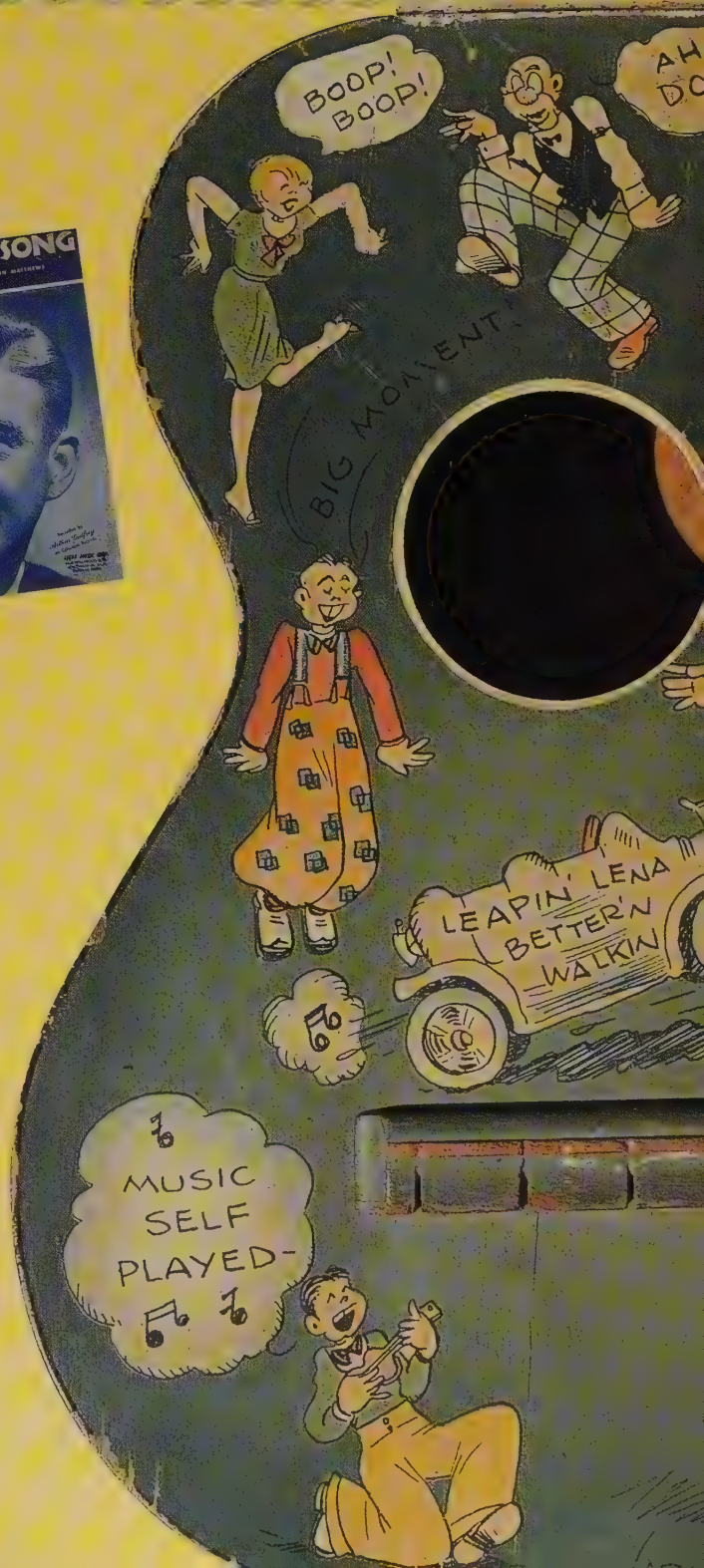


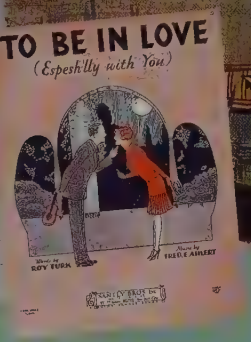
"Crazy Words Crazy Tune Vo-Do-De-O," 1927,
crazy words by Jack Yellen; crazy music by Milton Ager (crazy uke arrangement by May Singhi Breen). The first verse starts out, "There's a guy I'd like to kill; if he doesn't stop I will, got a ukulele and a voice that's loud and shrill." Has a ukulele/daily rhyme.
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Music

"Hum and Strum, Do, Do, Do, That's What I Do," 1928,
words by Billie Meyers; music by Elmer Schoebel. This song suggests that a little old friend (the uke) is just the thing to chase "lonesomeness away."
Courtesy of Forster Music

"Makin' Love Ukulele Style," 1949,
words by Charlie Hayes; music by Paul Weirick. Recorded by Arthur Godfrey and Dean Martin.
Courtesy of Mayfair Music, a division of MPL Communications.

"The Ukulele Song," 1950,
words and music by Terry Shand and Jason Matthews. Recorded by Arthur Godfrey on Columbia Records. From the collection of DeSoto Brown.
Courtesy of MCA Music.





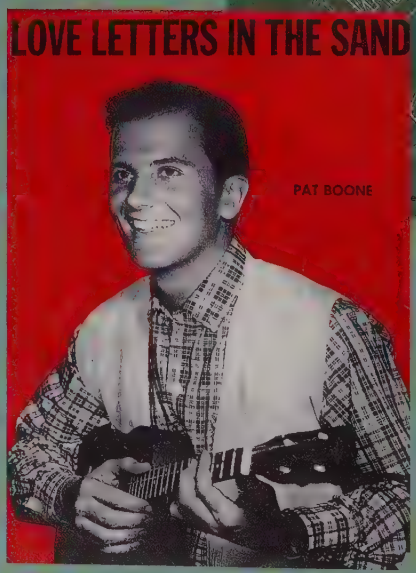
Because the ukulele became a symbol for romance and a carefree life, some songs from this period used the uke simply as part of the cover illustration. Four delightful examples of this are…

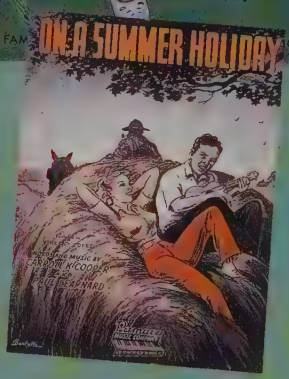
***"Oh Agnes,"* 1919,**
words by Arthur J. Jackson; music by Bud DeSylva. Tuxedoed gent with uke and a singing dog serenade the lovely Agnes on her balcony. DeSylva was also an accomplished uke player; his playing was featured on the first Jolson recording of "California, Here I Come," another DeSylva tune.

***"To Be in Love,"* 1929,**
words by Roy Turk; music by Fred E. Ahlert. Boy, girl, uke, moon.
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Music

***"Good Night Moon,"* 1931,**
words and music by Walter Donaldson. Boy, girl, uke and moon.
Courtesy of Walter Donaldson Music

***"On a Summer Holiday,"* 1942,**
words and music by Carroll K. Cooper and Paul Learnard. Boy playing uke, girl, hayride.





Other pieces of sheet music featured a picture of the performer(s) of the song holding a uke. Sometimes these were songs associated with movies, especially, it seems, the films of Paramount Pictures. Examples of both, include…

***"When Mother Nature Sings Her Lullaby,"* 1938,**
words and music by Larry Yoell and Glenn Brown. Great studio shot of Bing Crosby playing what looks like a fancy Hawaiian model.
Courtesy of Warner Bros. Music and the Estate of Bing Crosby

***"Love Letters in the Sand,"* 1931,**
words by Nick and Charles Kenny; music by J. Fred Coots. On the cover of the '50s version, Pat Boone with a vest and a baritone uke. *Courtesy of Bourne Music.*

***"In The Middle Of A Kiss,"* 1935,**
words and music by Sam Coslow. Song from the Paramount picture, *College Scandal*. Cool photo/illustration of a coed character from the film strumming what looks like a Hawaiian uke.
Courtesy of Famous Music

***"In A Little Hula Heaven,"* 1937,**
words and music by Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger. Song from the Paramount picture *Waikiki Wedding*. Photo of Bing Crosby playing a taropatch uke seated next to island-happy Shirley Ross.
Courtesy of Famous Music and the Estate of Bing Crosby.

***"Let's Get Lost,"* 1943,**
words by Frank Loesser; music by Jimmy McHugh. Song from the Paramount picture *Happy Go Lucky*. Neat shot of three of the stars holding ukes, including Mary Martin and Rudy Vallee.
Courtesy of Famous Music.

***"Song for Anna,"* 1972,**
original French words by Jean-Claude Massoulier, English words by H. E. R. Barnes; music by Andre Popp. Biggest hit for Ohta-San; recorded as an instrumental.
Courtesy of Warner/Chappell Music.

RIGHT: DETAIL, BING CROSBY FROM *WHEN MOTHER NATURE SINGS HER LULLABY.*

Radio Waves

From 1935 to 1975, the legendary radio program *Hawaii Calls* sent the sounds of Hawaii (including a lot of uke strums) over the air to hundreds of stations throughout the Mainland and the world. Created by Webley Edwards with famed songwriter Harry ("Sweet Leilani") Owens as musical director, the very first program was beamed via shortwave to the West Coast on Saturday, July 3, 1935. Emanating literally from under the banyan tree in the courtyard of Oahu's Moana Hotel, *Hawaii Calls* was described as "Hawaiian music played by Hawaiians from Hawaii."

Memories of Hawaii Calls—from the cover of their CD with the original cast. Courtesy of Donald "Flip" McDiarmid III and *Hawaii Calls*.

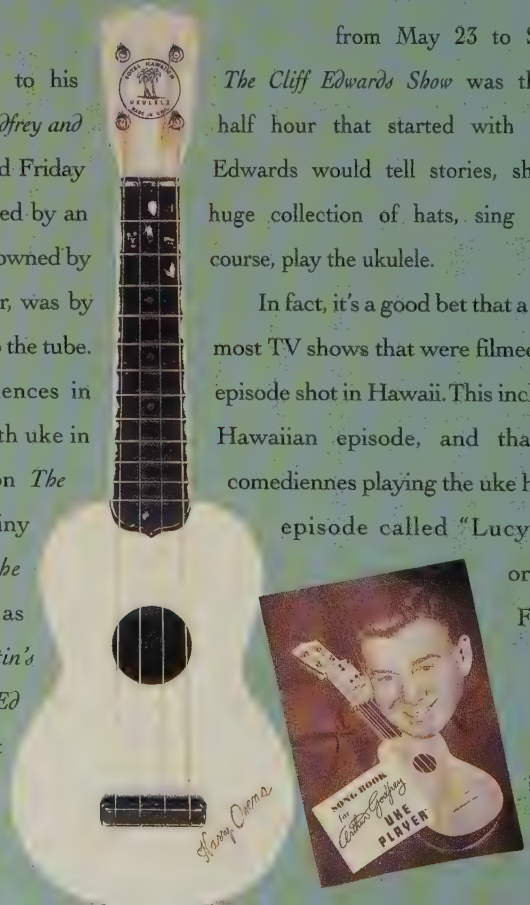
The TV Pal

Thanks to Arthur Godfrey's huge popularity during the 1950s, millions of his television viewers were exposed to the ukulele. In fact, from April 4 to June 30, 1950, he actually gave ukulele lessons to his television audience on his show *Arthur Godfrey and His Ukulele*. This show ran on Tuesday and Friday nights from 7:45 to 8:00 and was sponsored by an orange juice concentrate that was partially owned by "The Redhead" himself. Godfrey, however, was by no means the only person to take the uke to the tube.

One of the largest television audiences in history gathered to watch Tiny Tim (with uke in hand) and Miss Vicky get married on *The Tonight Show*, December 17, 1969. Tiny made more than a dozen visits to *The Tonight Show* during his heyday, as well as regular appearances on *Rowan & Martin's Laugh In*, *The Merv Griffin Show*, *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and even the first episode of *Ironside*.

Also getting into the television act was Cliff "Ukulele Ike" Edwards who had his own short-lived show. Airing from May 23 to September 19, 1949, *The Cliff Edwards Show* was the remainder of the half hour that started with CBS's *Nightly News*. Edwards would tell stories, show off some of his huge collection of hats, sing some songs and, of course, play the ukulele.

In fact, it's a good bet that a uke was worked into most TV shows that were filmed in Hawaii or did an episode shot in Hawaii. This includes the *Brady Bunch* Hawaiian episode, and that most famous of comediennes playing the uke herself in a *Here's Lucy* episode called "Lucy Goes Hawaiian," originally broadcast February 22, 1971.



Harry Owens' signature Royal Hawaiian uke.

—

Songbook for Arthur Godfrey uke player.

Tiny Tim and Miss Vicky in marital bliss on *The Tonight Show*. Courtesy of Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show*.

—

Lucy and Lucie going Hawaiian. Permission for the image and likeness of Lucille Ball, courtesy of Desilu & Co., LLC.

THE UKE SHOWED UP ON *THE LAWRENCE WELK SHOW* IN SEVERAL VIGNETTES. LAWRENCE WELK WITH BARBARA BOYLAN AND BOBBY BURGESS ON *THE LAWRENCE WELK SHOW*. COURTESY OF THE WELK GROUP.

Poncie Ponce, one of the stars of the 1958 to 1963 TV detective show *Hawaiian Eye*, played the ukulele in his role as Kim, the cabdriver. A popular entertainer for years in Hawaii and the Mainland, Ponce was famous for performing "The Stars and Stripes Forever" on his Martin tenor uke with a custom-built, flip-up flag attached to the back.

Poncie Ponce in 1959.
Courtesy of Poncie Ponce.

BLUE HAWAII
ADVERTISING PHOTO
COURTESY OF
THE ESTATE OF ELVIS PRESLEY

THE ELVIS PRESLEY USA

The Uke And Hollywood

In 1993, the ukulele played a small but crucial part in the hit movie, *In the Line of Fire*. As Clint Eastwood, playing a Presidential Secret Service agent, is racing to figure out what the word "skellum" means, another character happens to mention that the word "ukelele" is how he remembers a certain phone number. While Eastwood informs this guy that the correct spelling is u-k-u-l-e-l-e, he realizes that "skellum" might refer to a phone number.

The ukulele has been featured many times on the silver screen. Perhaps the uke's greatest starring role occurred in *Blue Hawaii* in the hands of the "King of Rock 'n' Roll" himself, Elvis Presley. A 1961 Paramount release, *Blue Hawaii* was Presley's biggest box-office hit and the soundtrack recording to the film (featuring Presley playing the uke on the cover) was his thirteenth Gold Record. The soundtrack recording was also Presley's longest-running Number One album on the *Billboard* charts, lasting a total of 20 weeks.

Another memorable movie role for the uke was in the hands of Marilyn Monroe in Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* (1959, MGM). The uke is featured in the production number "Runnin' Wild." Among the special treats of the soundtrack recording of this movie are the famous Richard Avedon stills on the cover of Ms. Monroe cavorting with her uke.

Some other notable appearances of the uke occur in the following movies...

LAUREL AND HARDY, 1933

—

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN, 1981

USED BY PERMISSION OF TURNER ENTERTAINMENT

Alice Faye and Betty Grable in *Tin Pan Alley*. Used by Permission of 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation

***Pennies from Heaven*, 1981.**

MGM/Turner Entertainment. Steve Martin plays a tenor uke during a performance of "Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries." (The ukulele shows up in at least three Steve Martin movies, the other two being *Three Amigos* and *The Jerk*. The dubbed uke playing in The Jerk was provided by none other than Lyle Ritz! See Chapter 2, *The Great Players and Personalities*.) *Courtesy of Turner Entertainment.*

***The Purple Rose of Cairo*, 1985.**

Orion. Woody Allen gives the uke a supporting role in this wonderful movie. In front of a music store, Mia Farrow admits to Jeff Daniels that, "I can play the ukulele. My father taught me before he ran away." Farrow then strums a very respectable "Alabamy Bound" on what looks like a Martin 0.

***Joe Versus the Volcano*, 1990.**

Warner Bros. Tom Hanks really plays what looks like an early Martin 5M. While Hanks picks a bit in several scenes, in one scene he strums and sings "The Cowboy Song" while floating on his luggage in the middle of the ocean. Where better?

***Mixed Nuts*, 1994.**

Tristar. As one of the "nuts," Adam Sandler actually plays "Deck the Halls" on what appears to be a Martin 0.

***Sons of the Desert*, 1933.**

Hal Roach. Ollie plays the uke and sings "Honolulu Baby" in this classic Laurel and Hardy misadventure.

***A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1949.**

Paramount. Bing Crosby teaches King Arthur's court musicians to swing. As he re-tunes one fellow's uke-like instrument, Crosby says, "There's a new tuning on these instruments gonna sweep the country." After tuning up to the "my-dog-has-fleas" tuning, Crosby states, "There's a dance that goes with these things, but that's another story."

***Honolulu*, 1939.**

MGM. Gracie Allen has a couple of wonderful moments with a ukulele. In one scene she is shown having a hard time tuning her uke, finally admitting to her friend, "You see what's wrong, Dorothy — the dogs are all right, but the fleas are out of tune."

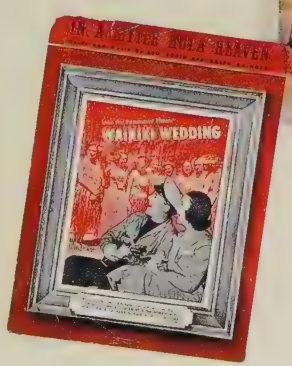
***Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, 1969.**

Twentieth Century-Fox. Oscar-winning theme song "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head" features ukulele accompaniment.

The ukulele has played a role in a number of "island" movies by virtue of its presence in poster art, publicity stills or home video sleeves. Surprisingly, the uke doesn't always appear in the actual film.

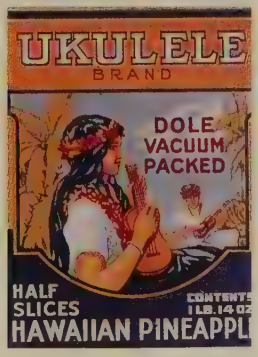
For example, *Waikiki Wedding* (1939, Paramount) featured Bing Crosby in publicity stills with a uke. In the film, however, Crosby doesn't strum a note. The home video sleeve to the *Road to Singapore* (1940, Paramount), starring Bob Hope, Dorothy Lamour and Crosby, shows Hope strumming a uke that he never plays in the film. The same is also true for *Ma and Pa Kettle at Waikiki* (1955, Universal), where the poster shows Pa strumming while Ma hulas. In the movie, Ma does hula, but Pa is uke-less.

One interpretation of this phenomenon is that the ukulele was used in all of these situations as a symbol to suggest either "Hawaii" or "island," and "fun." Its actual use in the film was not nearly as important.



Waikiki Wedding. While Crosby doesn't play the uke, he does sing "Sweet Leilani," the Oscar-winning song written by Harry Owens. (This movie premiered in Honolulu on March 25, 1937 to a packed crowd, and was preceded by a stage show with popular Hawaiian entertainer, Ray Kinney, singing and playing his ukulele.) Courtesy of Famous Music Corporation and the Estate of Bing Crosby.

Ma and Pa Kettle at Waikiki. From a movie poster one-sheet. Copyright ©1997 by Universal City Studios, Inc. Courtesy of MCA Publishing Rights, a Division of MCA Inc. All Rights Reserved.



USED BY PERMISSION OF THE DOLE FOOD COMPANY. "UKULELE BRAND" IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF DOLE FOOD COMPANY, INC.

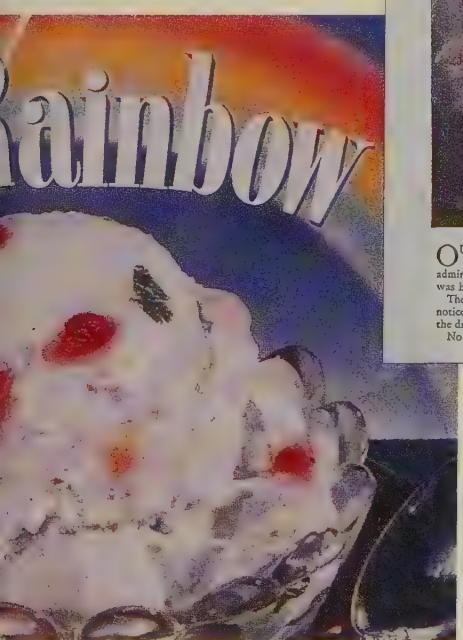
The Ukulele In Advertising

As one of the cultural ambassadors of Hawaii, as well as a symbol of fun and relaxation, the ukulele became a potent image for marketers. In the early years, Dole used colorful brands and labels on its canned pineapple. On the "Ukulele Brand"® label, Dole featured a lovely Hawaiian maiden strumming her uke.

In 1929, Lambert Pharmacal Co. of St. Louis used an illustration of a young woman playing the uke for its Listerine ad. Apparently, this "gay Philadelphia girl" was quite popular when strumming her uke outdoors. Inside, however, was a completely different story due to her "halitosis" (unpleasant breath). In the fifties, Tampax produced an ad with the image of a modern woman with her uke in order to evoke carefree confidence and grab the attention of the reader. Even as recently as 1994, the audio manufacturer Kenwood used an early picture of Tiny Tim with his uke in an attempt to apologize for the fact that even they couldn't make Tiny "sound good."

One of the most magnificent graphic depictions of the ukulele was created by Frank McIntosh. McIntosh, a California illustrator, was commissioned in the late thirties to design a series of menus for Matson cruise ships that regularly

Used by permission of
Matson Navigation Company.



Outdoors adored . . . indoors ignored

OUTDOORS they adored this gay Philadelphia girl. She was continually surrounded with admirers. But indoors it was another story. She was hopelessly out of things.

The truth is that her trouble which went unnoticed in the open, became instantly apparent in the drawing room.

No intelligent person dares to assume complete freedom from halitosis (unpleasant breath).

Surveys show one person out of three is an occasional or habitual offender. This is due to the fact that odor-producing conditions (often caused by germs) arise constantly in even normal mouths.

The one way of keeping your breath always beyond suspicion is to rinse the mouth with full strength Listerine every morning and night and before meeting others.

Being a germicide capable of killing even the Staphylococcus Aureus (pus) germ in 15 seconds, Listerine first strikes at the cause of odors, and then, being a powerful deodorant, destroys the odors themselves.

No fastidious person should overlook this precaution. Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Mo., U.S.A.

Courtesy of Warner-Lambert Company

RIGHT:
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OF MATSON NAVIGATION
COMPANY.

carried tourists to Hawaii. On the final night, the menu featured a multicolored illustration of a ukulele surrounded by an explosion of Hawaiian flowers and fruits. Diners were so taken with his designs that many saved the complete series of menus and had them framed in bamboo to hang in their homes. Today, these menus (complete and in good condition) are considered collectables and can fetch a high price. Another collectable uke-themed menu was designed by John Kelly for the Royal Hawaiian Hotel (see page 10).

The Ukulele Today

If you look carefully, there is plenty of evidence that the ukulele is very much alive and well today. The Ukulele Festival, held each year in Honolulu's Kapiolani Park, is just one example of the ukulele's continued vitality. Usually held on the last Sunday afternoon in July, the Ukulele Festival is the creation of Roy Sakuma. In 1996 this event celebrated its twenty-sixth anniversary and attracted four thousand ukulele players and fans. While the festival is one enormous recital for the 400 or more students of Roy Sakuma's ukulele school, the three-hour show also features many of the finest ukulele players in the world as well as current uke-playing Hawaiian pop stars. Appearing at these festivals are such luminaries as Ohta San, Lyle Ritz, Moe Keale, and Yuji Igarashi.

POSTER FROM THE '96 FESTIVAL

Further evidence comes from the year's worth of back orders for Kamaka ukuleles and the emergence of a number of luthiers (both in Hawaii and the Mainland), who are busy making fine ukuleles. Part of what is driving this renewed appreciation is the current crop of Hawaiian artists who are fine ukulele players. Performers like Troy Fernandez from the Ka'au Crater Boys, Willie K., Bryan Tolentino and Israel Kamakawiwo'ole are true ukulele virtuosos and have put this instrument front and center in their music. Many of these artists have performed at the Ukulele Festival in Kapiolani Park and they are musical heroes for the assembled. No better proof of the simple power of a uke and a voice exists than the line of children waiting to get Kamakawiwo'ole's autograph after a performance at the festival.

Another aspect of the uke revival in Hawaii is a renewed appreciation for all things Hawaiian, especially among the younger generations. As a big chapter in Hawaii's musical history, the ukulele is getting swept up in this enthusiasm. The ukulele also benefits from being a sophisticated instrument that is highly portable and relatively easy to learn. Whatever the reason, Roy Sakuma has seen a significant increase in the number of people who want to take uke lessons.

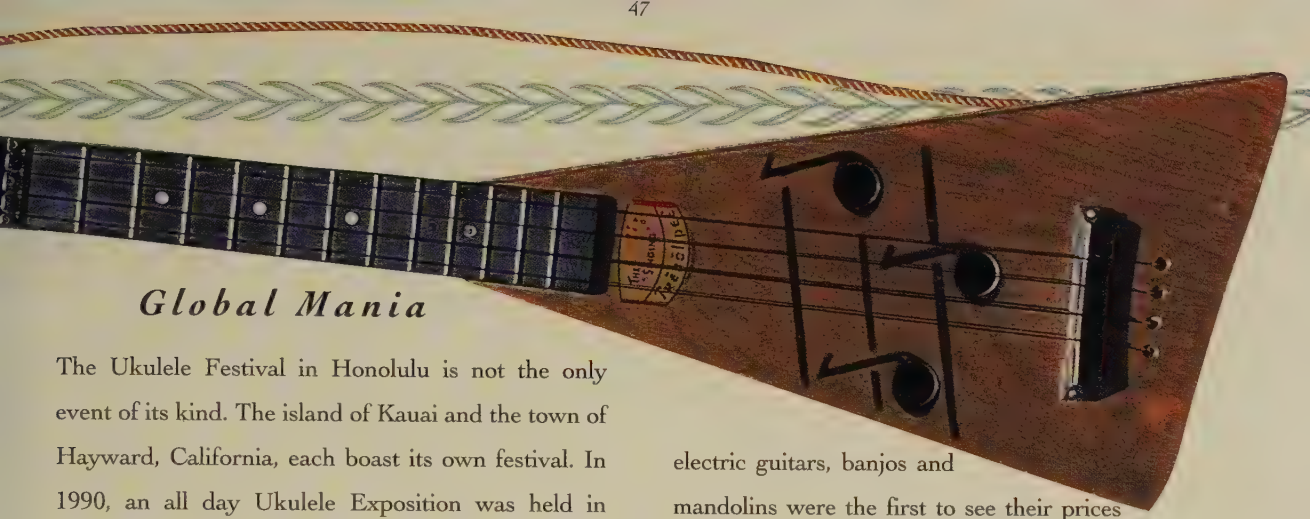
Right: Flying V
Center: Enigmaphon
Left: Flounderitin
Three contemporary ukes designed and manufactured by Brian Stapleton.

—

Below: "Koa Soup"
Photo By Paul Syphers

These are entitled "Ten Views of the Ukulele"—spoofs on famous artists' works by John Boden. © Prof. John Boden, Director of Visual Art, University of Ukulele Studies. Reproduced by permission of the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain.

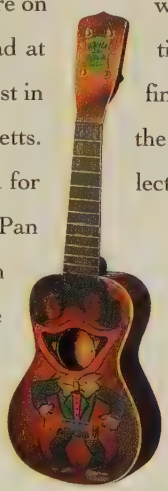
Swagerty Surf-A-Lele and the "Singing" Treholipee
Two unusually-shaped ukes designed and manufactured
by Swagerty Specialties Co. of San Clemente, CA.
The longer Treholipee is four and one-half feet from
tip-to-tip, and also came in red, blue,
orange and black. Apparently this unique instrument
was aimed at the beach and surf crowd.
Should some good waves come in,
you could easily ditch your Treholipee by sticking
the top end into the sand and grab your surfboard.



Global Mania

The Ukulele Festival in Honolulu is not the only event of its kind. The island of Kauai and the town of Hayward, California, each boast its own festival. In 1990, an all day Ukulele Exposition was held in Montague, Massachusetts, and featured an exhibit, performance, lecture and a local radio tie-in. The producers of that expo are now continuing to put on even bigger events. Other known uke-enthusiast countries include Japan, the United Kingdom, and Canada, where ukulele is taught in many of the schools.

Mainland ukulele clubs, where members get together on a regular basis to sing and strum, are on the rise. At last count, Southern California had at least three such clubs, with others known to exist in Chicago, Texas, San Francisco and Massachusetts. Part of this, no doubt, is driven by a nostalgia for the slower, simpler life portrayed in the old Tin Pan Alley songs. The uke, in this case, becomes an effective antidote to the frantic pace of life these days. On business trips, the uke can be a real "de-stresser," and, because of its small size, it can be carried on any plane.



THE LAFFING UKE. PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL SYPHERS

The Collector Market

Another key part of the current ukulele story is the vitality of the collector market. Especially over the last ten years, interest in collecting vintage musical instruments has exploded. While older acoustic and electric guitars, banjos and mandolins were the first to see their prices soar, vintage ukuleles have become highly sought after and collectable. This has been true particularly of the finer ukes, such as the old koa, brand name Hawaiian ukes, and the ukes made by Martin, Gibson, National and Lyon & Healy. Ironically, the names of the Martin styles 1K, 2K, 3K, and 5K, now more reflect their value in thousands of dollars than the koa wood out of which they were made. For example, a mint condition Martin 5K hovers around $5,000, if you can find one. The cheaper, painted, "cartoony" ukes of the twenties and thirties have especially become collector's items—even the plastic ukes of the fifties.

One of the world's biggest ukulele collections belongs to Akira Tsumura of Japan. His ukes have been on display at the Honolulu Academy of Arts and San Francisco International Airport.

Articles and books have been written about why people collect things. The current interest in collecting musical instruments, the Hawaiiana boom, and preserving artifacts of the twentieth century for succeeding generations somehow can't entirely explain away the passion of some uke collectors. Perhaps the best way to explain it is that you can't walk into a room full of ukes and not smile.

The First Players

Because of his unique place in history, Joao Fernandez becomes the "missing link" player of the ukulele. As a result of his performance upon arrival in Honolulu Harbor, the braguinha captured the heart of Hawaii. Thanks to the playing of both Fernandez and Augusto Dias, the braguinha continued to attract attention and establish a potential market, which ultimately led to the refining of the braguinha into the modern-day ukulele.

The Great Players And Personalities

The contributions of Fernandez, Dias and King Kalakaua in the years just after 1879 can't be overstated (see *Chapter One*). Without their enthusiasm and performing ability early on, the ukulele might never have been born.

What follows are some of the best known players of the ukulele;
each is a link in an ongoing chain
that began in 1879 and continues today.

The Great Hawaiian Players

Ernest Kaai
(JANUARY 1, 1881–1962)

LEFT: KAAI'S *UKULELE SOLOS* SONGBOOK.
COURTESY OF DESOTO BROWN COLLECTION.

BELOW: ERNEST KAAI PLAYING THE UKULELE WITH A FRIEND PLAYING THE LAP STEEL, HONOLULU, CIRCA 1916.
PHOTO BY RAY JEROME BAKER,
THE BISHOP MUSEUM.

ERNEST KAAI was the first Hawaiian-born virtuoso ukulele player. Besides playing the uke, Kaai was a superb mandolin player and a talented violin, guitar and steel guitar player. He was equally as successful as a songwriter, arranger, singer, concert promoter, music teacher, and all-around impresario. Kaai was also the first to copyright music in Hawaii.

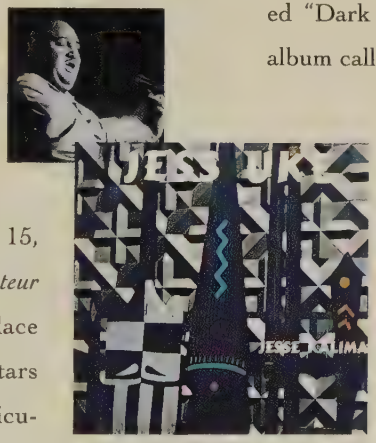
It was as a ukulele player, however, that Kaai really left his mark. According to the famous Hawaiian songwriter Johnny Noble ("My Little Grass Shack In Kealakekua, Hawaii"), Kaai was "Hawaii's greatest ukulele player." Due to his musical ability, he is credited for turning the ukulele into a featured instrument of the Hawaiian orchestra.

Kaai is also noted for publishing the very first ukulele instructional book: *The Ukulele, A Hawaiian Guitar,* in 1916. This method book presented the ukulele as a sophisticated musical instrument. Including the more exotic minor and diminished chords, the book describes in great detail how to produce a variety of complicated strums, especially the syncopated and ragtime strokes. Kaai gets quite passionate about the instrument, admitting that "...any glee or musical club in the islands without the ukulele is far from being perfect" and that one

could have "...more pleasure out of [an ukulele] in one month than on a guitar or any stringed instrument in one year."

Due to his efforts, by the 1920s the ukulele had become a permanent feature of Hawaiian ensembles. Around 1940, Kaai retired to Miami, Florida, where he opened a music store and continued to perform informally.

Jesse Kalima
(1920–1980)



JESSE KALIMA PLAYING HIS AMPLIFIED TENOR UKE.
—
JESS UKE—JESSE KALIMA, SOUNDS OF HAWAII. FEATURES HAWAIIAN REPERTOIRE.

JESSE KALIMA is recognized for presenting the ukulele as a solo instrument. At the age of 15, he entered the *Territorial Amateur Hour Contest* and won first place with his ukulele rendition of "Stars and Stripes Forever." This particular arrangement became a hit and a long career was established. Not only did "Stars and Stripes Forever" become Kalima's theme song, but for many years after it became an essential part of any aspiring uke player's repertoire.

Kalima's other ukulele contributions include being the first to use amplification and popularizing the larger-sized tenor uke. He preferred this size because of its greater resonance and wider fret spaces (for his stubby fingers). He is also credited with introducing the arrangement technique known as "chord soloing," where the melody and the harmony of a song are played simultaneously.

In 1938, with his two brothers and a cousin, Kalima formed a group called the Kalima Brothers. Some of the songs for which the Kalima Brothers were best known included Tin Pan Alley songs like "Jalousie," "Dark Eyes" and "Under The Double Eagle." All of them featured Jesse's unique brand of ukulele chord soloing. His recording career included "Dark Eyes" as a 78-rpm single and his first album called *Jess Uke.*

Eddie Kamae
(AUGUST 4, 1927)

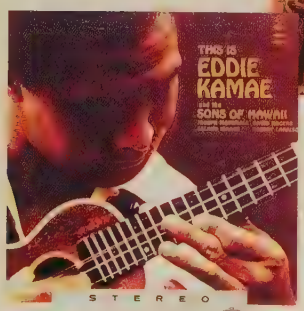
EDDIE KAMAE was 14 years old when his brother Sam found a ukulele on a city bus. Not knowing the first thing about how to play it, yet in love with the sound, Kamae learned what he could from his brother, and then sought out any material or persons that could teach him more. At Charlie's Taxi, which also served as a musicians' hangout, in downtown Honolulu, Kamae met Shoi Ikemi. In 1948, the two teamed up to create the first all-ukulele group, the Ukulele Rascals.

For many years, the Ukulele Rascals played virtually every kind of music other than Hawaiian, including Latin, jazz, American folk, and popular songs. This was due to Kamae's desire for a musical challenge, finding the Hawaiian music too simple. With a background that included courses from the University of Hawaii in music theory, he even arranged and played very demanding classical pieces.

Like Jesse Kalima, Kamae also is credited with originating his own technique of "chord soloing," where, by plucking all four strings simultaneously, one can hear the melody and chords at the same time. Another Kamae trademark was a guitar-like *rasgueado* sound achieved by quickly strumming his long fingernails across the strings. One popular song in the Rascals' repertoire that sparkles from this technique is their version of "Malagueña."

In 1957, Eddie Kamae had a major musical change of heart and dedicated himself to playing Hawaiian music only. Kamae started the Sons Of Hawaii in 1960 with the legendary slack key guitar player, Gabby Pahinui. With their unique blend of ancient and new Hawaiian musical elements, the Sons Of Hawaii revolutionized contemporary Hawaiian music.

THE SONS OF HAWAII IN 1980, EDDIE KAMAE IS SECOND FROM RIGHT.



THIS IS EDDIE KAMAE—EDDIE KAMAE AND THE SONS OF HAWAII, HULA RECORDS. A GOOD EXAMPLE OF KAMAE AFTER HE "DISCOVERED" HAWAIIAN MUSIC. FEATURED ARE FOUR TRADITIONAL HAWAIIAN MELODIES AND THREE SONGS WRITTEN BY QUEEN LILI'UOKALANI. THE LINER NOTES OBSERVE THAT KAMAE IS PARTICULARLY FOND OF THE QUEEN'S MUSIC BECAUSE HIS GRANDMOTHER WAS A COURT HULA DANCER DURING THE REIGN OF LILI'UOKALANI.

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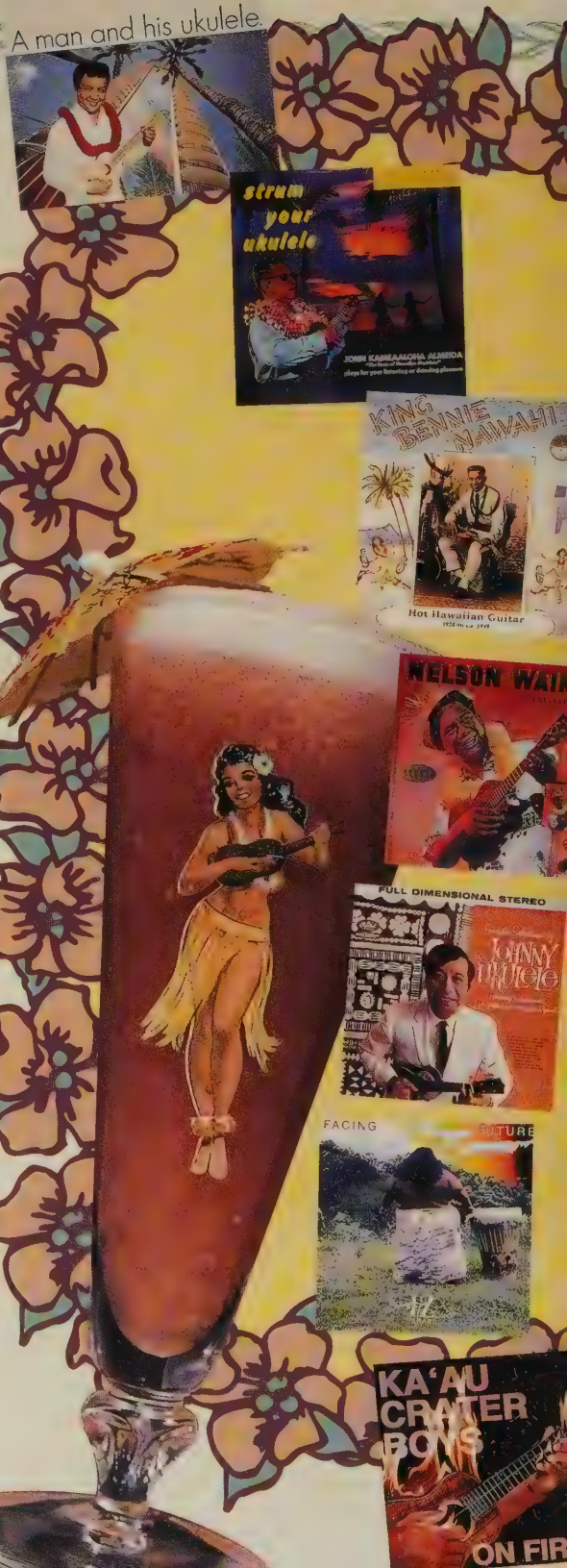
HEART OF THE UKULELE—EDDIE KAMAE, MAHALO RECORDS. A COMBINATION OF "BELOVED HAWAIIAN FAVORITES AND POPULAR INTERNATIONAL MELODIES." INCLUDES KAMAE'S UNIQUE RIGHT HAND WORK ON "GRANADA" AND "COME BACK TO SORRENTO." COURTESY OF LEHUA RECORDS.

A man and his ukulele.



A Man And His Ukulele—Eddie Bush, Sea Shell Records. The "Charles Ives" of the ukulele, for at the time of this recording, Eddie Bush was working days at the Bank of Hawaii and spending his evenings performing in two of Hawaii's top show rooms. Included are a number of pieces that show off Bush's nimble technique. One of the best is his rendition of "Holiday For Strings."

Strum Your Ukulele—John Kameaaloha Almeida, 49th State Hawaii Record Co. Blind from the age of ten, Almeida was known as the "Dean of Hawaiian music."A very prolific composer of hundreds of melodies, the entire program of this album was written by Almeida. Almeida also served as the chief musician for the Matson Navigation Company from 1924–1927. As such, his job was to select the musicians who performed on the cruise ships that ran between Hawaii and the West Coast. Courtesy of Cord International/Hana Ola Records.

King Bennie Nawahi—Hot Hawaiian Guitar, 1928 to 1949, Yazoo Records. Born July 3rd, 1899 in Honolulu, "King" Bennie Nawahi became a prominent steel guitar, ukulele and mandolin player. In 1919, Nawahi got a job playing all three instruments with his older brother Joe's group, the Hawaiian Novelty Five, on the passenger ship Matsonia. Soon after, at the height of the "uke" craze, Nawahi left to pursue a solo career as a vaudeville singer and ukulele virtuoso. He astonished audiences by playing extremely difficult pieces on the uke, sometimes with only one hand or playing the uke behind his head. As a result, theater showman Sid Grauman crowned Nawahi "King of the Ukulele." Throughout an active recording career and even with the total loss of his eyesight in 1935, Nawahi played his uke. He passed away in Long Beach, California in 1985.

This album features 16 tracks of Nawahi playing mostly steel guitar and uke. Especially recommended is his original tune, "Ukulele Bennie." Courtesy of Yazoo Records.

Nelson Waikiki—Ukulele Stylist, Tradewinds Records. A popular Hawaiian performer, Waikiki learned to play the uke at the age of ten. The liner notes point out that in addition to being a fine player, Waikiki "clowns" around when he plays, often strumming the uke from "above or behind his head." The album features a very delicate version of "Misty."

Favorite Selections By Johnny Ukulele, Capitol Records. Born with the last name of Kaaihue, Johnny Ukulele was so-named during his long tenure as a regular on *The Harry Owens Show*. As the liner notes inform us: "Johnny Ukulele does not 'strum.' He plays...Under his fleet fingers the ukulele becomes a full-fledged instrument with a charming, distinctive sound." Courtesy of Capitol Records.

Facing Future—Israel Kamakawiwo'ole, 1993, Bigboy Record Company. Kamakawiwo'ole is one of the new breed of popular Hawaiian artists who perform with a ukulele. A remarkably soulful singer, the selections feature mostly Hawaiian songs with a few pop song covers. A particular standout is his "Over the Rainbow"/"What a Wonderful World" medley.

On Fire!—Ka'au Crater Boys, 1994, Roy Sakuma Productions. Features the red-hot ukulele playing of Troy Fernandez. Courtesy of Roy Sakuma.

While Eddie Kamae's legacy as a ukulele virtuoso is secure, he will also be remembered as the mentor and teacher of another virtuoso, Ohta-San.

Ohta-San

(HERB OHTA, OCTOBER 21, 1934)

As of this writing, the reigning ukulele virtuoso in the world is OHTA-SAN. Building upon the technique of his mentor, Eddie Kamae, Ohta-San has taken this simple four-string instrument into remarkable virtuosic terrain.

With encouragement from his mother, Herb Ohta began playing the ukulele when he was seven years old. He learned to play well enough that as a young boy in 1944 he won first prize playing the ukulele on Honolulu's *KGMB Radio's Amateur Hour*. Ohta was so good that after he won a second time, the judges decided he was too skilled to compete against the other contestants.

As a child, Ohta was introduced to a wide variety of music, including that of the great classical composers, as well as modern jazz. This was of particular value when the then-twelve-year-old Ohta met Eddie Kamae. In addition to teaching his young protégé a number of his techniques, Kamae encouraged Ohta to apply these approaches to his classical and jazz repertoire as well as the popular songs of the day. Ohta also studied music theory at the University of Hawaii.

While serving in the Marines from 1953 to 1963, Ohta had little time to play the ukulele. He did, however, make an appearance in 1955 on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. After the Marines, Ohta met with Don McDiarmid of Hula Records. It was McDiarmid who gave the then Herb Ohta his first break as a recording artist in 1964 and his professional name of Ohta-San. That first break, an original song called "Sushi," became a Number One hit in Hawaii and was later released by Warner Bros. Records.

Since 1964, Ohta-San has recorded thirty plus albums for Decca Records, Warner Bros., Surfside, A&M and others, started a ukulele school, published his own instructional book called *Ukulele O Hawaii*, toured extensively throughout the world (he is especially popular in Japan) and played in many Waikiki hotels. He continues to record, tour and play a regular gig at the Queen Kapiolani Hotel in Waikiki.

To hear him play is to experience someone who is an absolute master of his instrument. Playing mostly popular songs with only four strings at his command, he impresses you with both the marvelous clarity and precision of his playing as well as the innovative beauty of his arrangements.

Across the street from the Queen Kapiolani Hotel is the park of the same name where the Ukulele Festival is held annually every summer—a festival run by a protégé of Ohta-San, Roy Sakuma.

SONG FOR ANNA—OHTA-SAN, A&M RECORDS. OHTA-SAN'S BIGGEST MAINSTREAM RECORDING, FEATURES THE HAUNTING HIT "SONG FOR ANNA." COURTESY OF POLYGRAM SPECIAL MARKETS.

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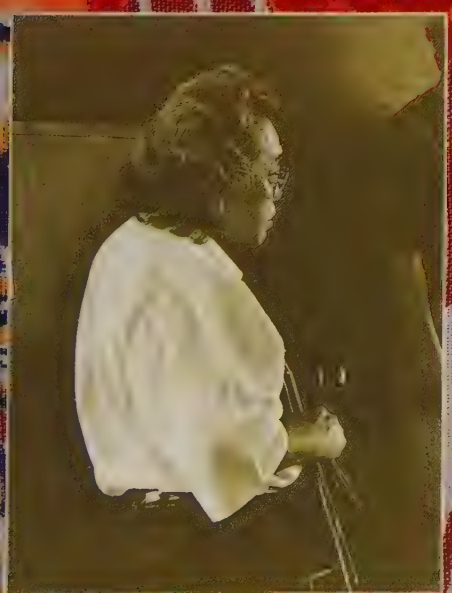
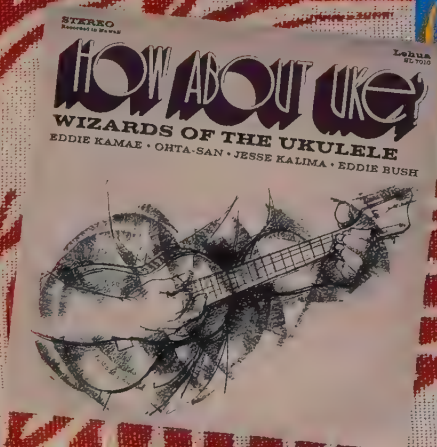
RIGHT: OHTA-SAN WAITING TO GO ON STAGE AT THE 1996 UKULELE FESTIVAL IN WAIKIKI. PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZABETH MAIHOCK BELOFF.

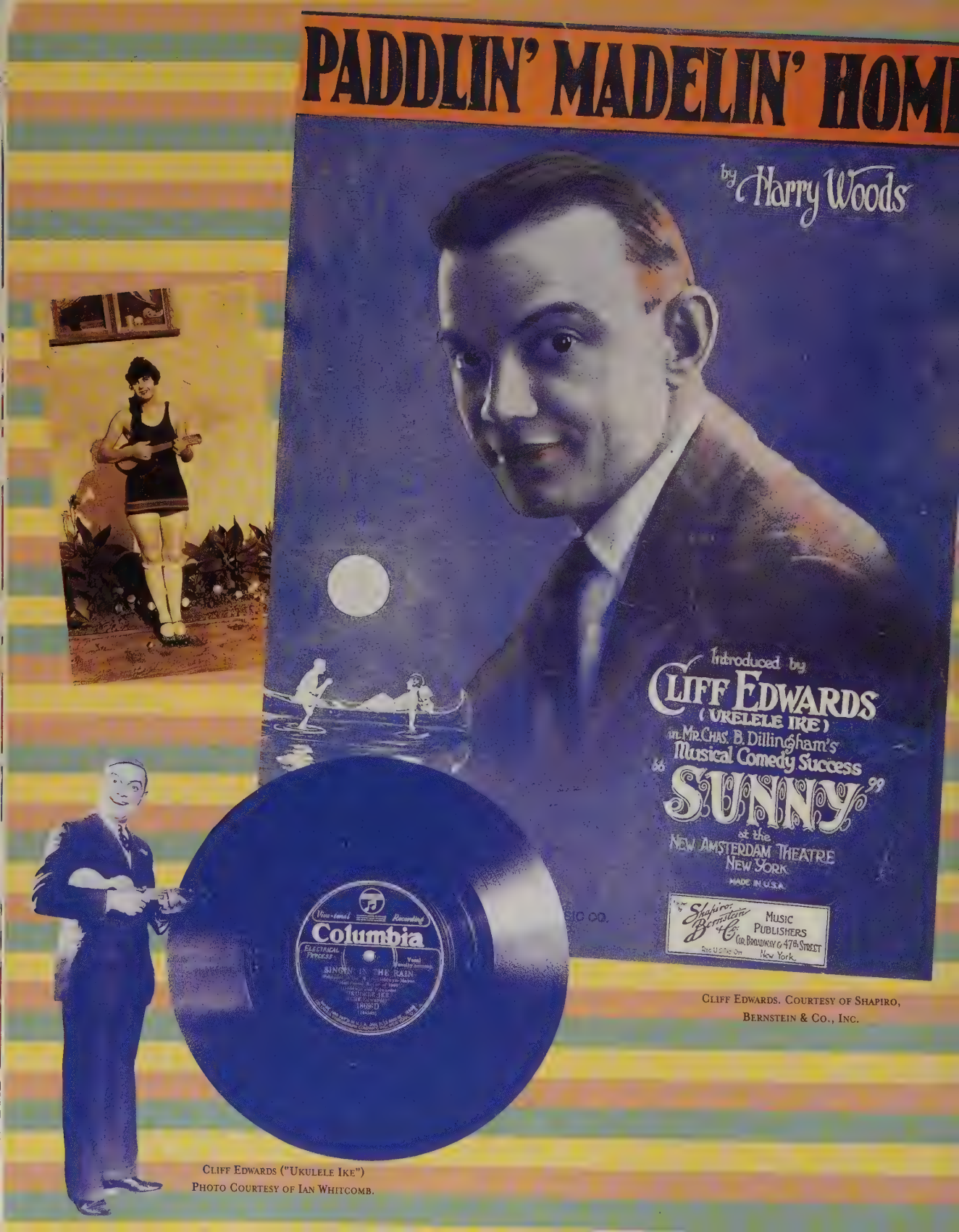
Ukulele Isle—Ohta-San, Decca Records. Ohta-San's debut Decca recording—typically masterful playing by one of the greatest ukulele virtuosos. Features Hawaiian standards and contemporary tunes like "Ebb Tide." Courtesy of MCA Special Markets & Products.

Where Is My Love Tonight—Ohta-San, 1993, Roy Sakuma Productions, Inc. Ohta-San exhibits his classic "cool touch" on this collection of Hawaiian pop songs. Standout tracks include "My Little Grass Shack in Kaleakakua" and "Makin' Love Ukulele Style." Lyle Ritz puts down his uke to play bass on this one. Courtesy of Roy Sakuma Productions.

How About Uke? Wizards Of The Ukulele—Eddie Kamae, Ohta-San, Jesse Kalima, Eddie Bush, Lehua Records. A collection of mostly Hawaiian repertoire performed individually by four great uke virtuosi. Courtesy of Lehua Records.







Cliff Edwards. Courtesy of Shapiro, Bernstein & Co., Inc.

Cliff Edwards ("Ukulele Ike")
Photo Courtesy of Ian Whitcomb.

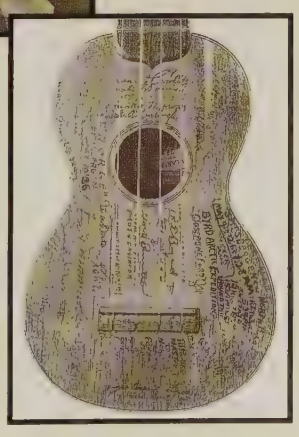
The Great Mainland and United Kingdom Players

Richard "Dick" Konter
(1882–1979)

RICHARD "DICK" KONTER was one of the volunteers on Commander Byrd's first expedition, May 9, 1926, to the North Pole. An American seaman, explorer and ukulele enthusiast, Konter was determined to introduce the ukulele to the Eskimos. With the help of the pilot, Konter smuggled a Martin koa uke aboard the plane. It was not until they reached Spitzbergen, the jumping-off point for the historic flight, that Konter realized that there were no Eskimos in that part of the world.

RICHARD KONTER WITH HIS UKE AT THE WHITE HOUSE. COURTESY OF MARTIN GUITAR COMPANY.

Despite this, the Konter uke entered the history books by being the first musical instrument to cross the North Pole. After the flight, everyone on the expedition, including Byrd, signed the ukulele. In addition, Konter was met in New York by twenty young women, who were former ukulele students, playing ukes in honor of his return. Later on, Konter gave the plain (but signed) little uke to the Martin Company and today it can be found in the Martin Museum in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. Konter, also known as 'Ukulele Dick," was the author of a couple of method books called *Dick's Ukulele Method* and *Dick's Improved Ukulele Method.*

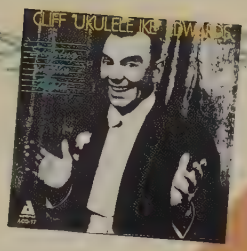


THE KONTER UKULELE THAT CROSSED THE NORTH POLE. COURTESY OF MARTIN GUITAR COMPANY.

Cliff Edwards
(JUNE 14, 1895–JULY 21, 1971)

CLIFF EDWARDS a/k/a UKULELE IKE was born in Hannibal, Missouri, and began his musical career performing in saloons around St. Louis. Because he couldn't always count on a piano being in the bar, Edwards learned to accompany himself on the ukulele. Prior to that, Edwards worked in a silent movie house, providing sound effects. Some of those "sounds" became part of his act, especially his ability to make sounds like a kazoo without actually playing one, a technique he called "eefin."

In 1918, Edwards formed a duo with pianist Bob Carleton, composer of the song "Ja-Da," a big novelty hit of the time. Largely on the strength of "Ja-Da," Edwards and Carleton got some good bookings on the vaudeville circuit. When Carleton left the duo to concentrate on songwriting, Edwards teamed up with stuttering comedian/pianist Joe Frisco. According to legend, they were performing in Chicago when a waiter, who could never remember Edwards' first name, started referring to Cliff as "Ike." The "Ukulele" part, of course, was



Singing in the Rain—Cliff Edwards, 1995, Audiophile Records. What is especially nice about this recent compilation of thirty-two of Edwards' performances is how much it features his fine uke accompaniment. Courtesy of Audiophile Records.

an obvious addition.

Becoming one of the great singing stars of the 1920s, Edwards found fame on both stage and screen. On the stage side, in 1924, he strummed and sang the song "Fascinating Rhythm" in Gershwin's *Lady Be Good* starring Fred and Adele Astaire. At the end of the twenties, he headed to Hollywood to pursue a movie career. One of his greatest claims to fame was that he introduced the song "Singin' in the Rain" in the movie *Hollywood Revue of 1929.*

In addition to a number of theatrical credits and over 100 movie appearances, Edwards also made hundreds of recordings and sold millions of records (Larry Kiner's biography of Edwards reports sales of "74 million recordings"), remarkable for any time. Between the years of 1922 to 1936, Cliff recorded for many different labels including Columbia and Pathé-Perfect. He had a string of hits between 1924 and 1933 with "It Had To Be You," "If You Knew Susie (Like I Know Susie)," "Paddlin' Madelin' Home," and "I Can't Give You Anything But Love." In addition to Edwards' beautiful singing voice and unique scat singing, many of these records feature his uke playing.

While Edwards' uke playing was meant primarily to serve his voice, he was actually a fine player. (Listening to some of the compilations of his recordings as well as seeing pictures of him, it appears that he particularly liked to play the tenor uke.) Thanks to his records, live performances and broadcasts, Edwards played a major role in the popularization of the ukulele in the twenties. As a result, much of the sheet music from that period included ukulele chord diagrams. He also put out three collections of standards arranged for the uke.

In 1940 Edwards had his biggest success when he was cast as the voice of Jiminy Cricket in Walt Disney's *Pinocchio*. Walt Disney himself decided that Edwards' voice, "the voice with the smile," would be perfect for the role. While few people today know the name of the person singing "When You Wish Upon A Star," everyone knows that voice.

Ukulele Ike Sings Again—Cliff Edwards, *Disneyland Records. The third album released on the Disneyland label, this record followed closely on the heels of the* Pinocchio *soundtrack, which, of course, featured Edwards as "Jiminy Cricket." Given Edwards' new publicity lift at the time, Disneyland re-recorded 16 songs that had been Ukulele Ike hits in the twenties, including "Singin' in the Rain," "June Night," "Ja-Da," and "I Cried for You." The liner notes point out that the number "37" was Edwards' lucky number (he was the 37th person to test for the voice of Jiminy Cricket).*

Wendell Hall

(AUGUST 23, 1896–APRIL 2,1969)

It wasn't until WENDELL HALL was in his late twenties that he started to play the ukulele. While Hall had learned to play a number of other musical instruments, it was the uke that he used to back up his performance on what would become his biggest hit. On November 16, 1923, Hall released "It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo'," on Victor records. Based on an old country folk tune, Hall provided new lyrics to "It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo'," and his version became Victor's biggest hit of the year, selling over two million copies.

Also known as "The Red-Headed Music Maker," Wendell Hall made other contributions to the uke world, including a number of songbooks, such as his *Famous Collection for the Ukulele,* published in 1950 by the Famous Music Corp. He also had his own Wendell Hall-signature ukulele known as the "Redhead." Like Cliff Edwards, Hall had a career that spanned vaudeville, radio, television, world tours and the movies.

"IT AIN'T GONNA RAIN NO MO'."
COURTESY OF FORSTER MUSIC.

Johnny Marvin

(JULY 11, 1897–DECEMBER 20, 1944)

JOHNNY MARVIN was one of the top recording artists of the twenties. Born in a covered wagon, Johnny Marvin's birthplace was probably somewhere in between Missouri and Butler, Oklahoma, where his family finally settled.

The Marvins were quite a musical family. Marvin's dad played the fiddle and the guitar, while his mother played the concertina and sang. Arguments with his father over the small amount of money they would earn playing neighborhood dances led Marvin to leave home repeatedly through his teenage years. In 1915 while still in his teens, Marvin joined a troupe of Hawaiian performers called the "Royal Hawaiians," filling in for an older member who had died on the tour. Marvin colored his hair black, stained his face, learned to speak pidgin Hawaiian and, most importantly, learned to play the ukulele.

Between 1917 and the mid twenties, Marvin served in the Navy, worked as a barber in San Francisco, put together a vaudeville act and married. In 1924, Marvin made his first record, which was followed by dozens more throughout the rest of the twenties. At the time Marvin imitated Ukulele Ike, who was very popular then, and even recorded under the name of Honey Duke and His Uke. Marvin appeared in a Broadway musical called *Honeymoon Lane* in 1926, which included a song he later recorded, entitled "Half a Moon."

With his recording career in full bloom, Marvin next teamed up with his brother Frankie as a vaudeville act. The show included Johnny performing some of the songs that had made him famous, while Frankie played the comedian.

When the Depression hit, Marvin's career moved to the new world of radio where he became known as "The Lonesome Singer of the Air." In the mid thirties, Marvin moved out to Hollywood to work with his friend "The Singing Cowboy," Gene Autry. While Marvin had written songs in the past including "Thinking of You, Thinking of Me," and his signature song "At The Close of a Long, Long, Day," he went on to compose

JOHNNY MARVIN UKE.

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JOHNNY MARVIN: A VOICE OF THE '20S, TAKE TWO RECORDS. THIS 1987 COMPILATION FEATURES MOSTLY LESSER-KNOWN NOVELTY SONGS THAT MARVIN RECORDED. MARVIN'S "12TH STREET RAG" SHOWCASES HIS UKULELE SKILLS. ALSO RECOMMENDED IS THE DELIGHTFUL "HALF A MOON."

ROY SMECK "VITA UKE."

around 80 songs for Autry films, the best known being "Goodbye Little Darlin'."

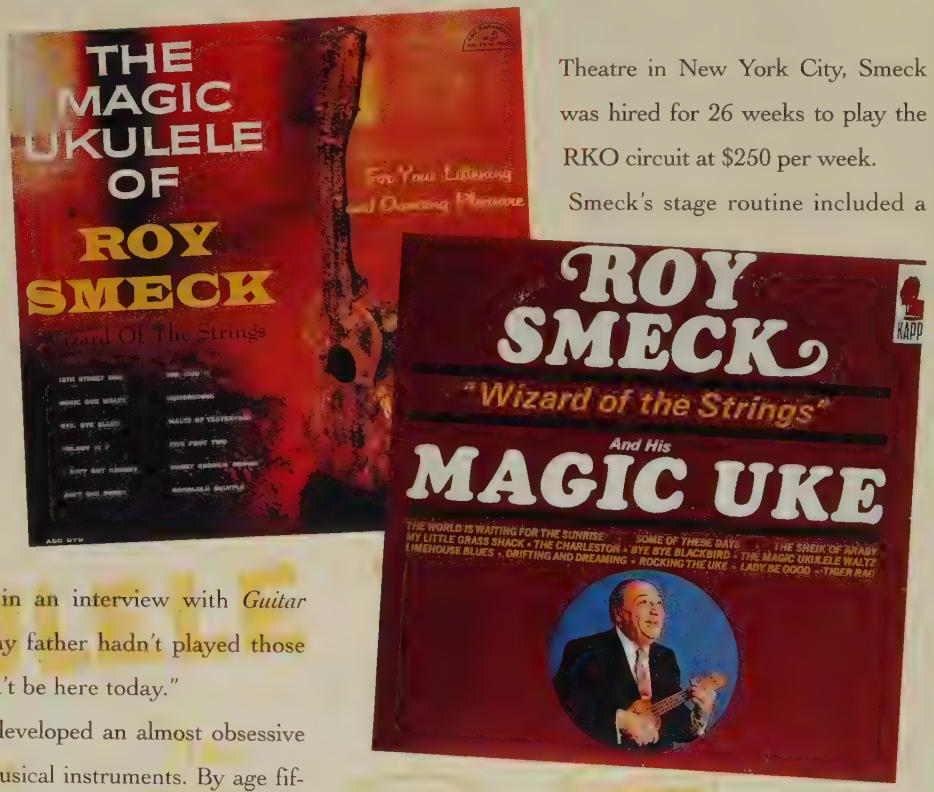
Another contribution Marvin made to the ukulele was his signature uke made by the Harmony Company. This uke is notable for its unique airplane-shaped bridge. While he was on tour in England in 1928, Marvin presented a special version of this uke (with gold-plated trimmings) to King Edward VIII.

Roy Smeck

(1900–APRIL 5,1994)

Known as the "Wizard of the Strings," ROY SMECK played a number of musical instruments brilliantly, including the guitar, banjo and the lap steel guitar. As astonishing as he was with all of those instruments, Roy was most wizard-like on the ukulele.

Born in Reading, Pennsylvania, Smeck moved with his family to Binghamton, New York when he was fourteen years old. His first musical instruments were the Jew's harp, harmonica and the (very popular at the time) Autoharp. Originally taught by an uncle, Smeck



rigged up a shoulder device so that he could play the harmonica and the Autoharp simultaneously. It was Smeck's father who showed him how to play three chords on an old Stella guitar and, in doing so, launched a career. According to Smeck in an interview with *Guitar Player* magazine, "If my father hadn't played those three chords, I wouldn't be here today."

Early on, Smeck developed an almost obsessive relationship with his musical instruments. By age fifteen, he had quit school, was working in a shoe factory and playing guitar, banjo and ukulele whenever and wherever he could. Later he was fired from the shoe factory for his habit of taking his uke to work with him and playing it in the men's room. In a true display of over-the-top passion Smeck admitted in one interview, "I even took it [the uke] to bed with me."

Smeck's big break occurred while he was working in a Binghamton music store. A salesman for a wholesale musical instrument house caught him running through his highly disciplined practice routine while on a break. Impressed by what he heard, he invited agents for the RKO Vaudeville Circuit to hear Smeck play. In 1926, after a successful audition in the Hamilton Theatre in New York City, Smeck was hired for 26 weeks to play the RKO circuit at $250 per week.

Smeck's stage routine included a demonstration of his abilities on several stringed instruments. After showing his prowess on banjo and Hawaiian guitar, Smeck would finish with the ukulele and perform "The 12th Street Rag" and a medley that included "Five Foot Two," "Ain't She Sweet" and "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

While Harry Reser was Smeck's major influence when it came to the banjo, it was Johnny Marvin who influenced Smeck's ukulele playing. It was Marvin's version of "The 12th Street Rag" that inspired Smeck to not only improve upon Marvin's rendition, but to push the ukulele further as a solo instrument. He applied some of the tricks he learned on the banjo to the ukulele, which included complex strums that

made it sound like not one, but two or three ukes being played. Imitating a tap dance break, Smeck would also tap on the body of the uke with his fingers.

The Magic Ukulele of Roy Smeck, ABC-Paramount. This is the first Smeck uke record and features his famous "12th Street Rag" solo. Like many of the other virtuosi, Smeck promotes the notion that the uke, given enough practice, can be a "solo instrument." In the liner notes he wrote, "My slogan has always been, 'You can play solos on the uke.'" Featured on the record is the Smeck-composed song "Uke Said It." Courtesy of MCA Special Markets & Products.

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Roy Smeck and His Magic Uke, Kapp Records. This extraordinary release also features the famous guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli. In addition, it includes two Smeck originals, "Magic Ukulele Waltz" and "Rockin' the Uke." Courtesy of MCA Special Markets & Products.

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Below: Roy Smeck concert uke

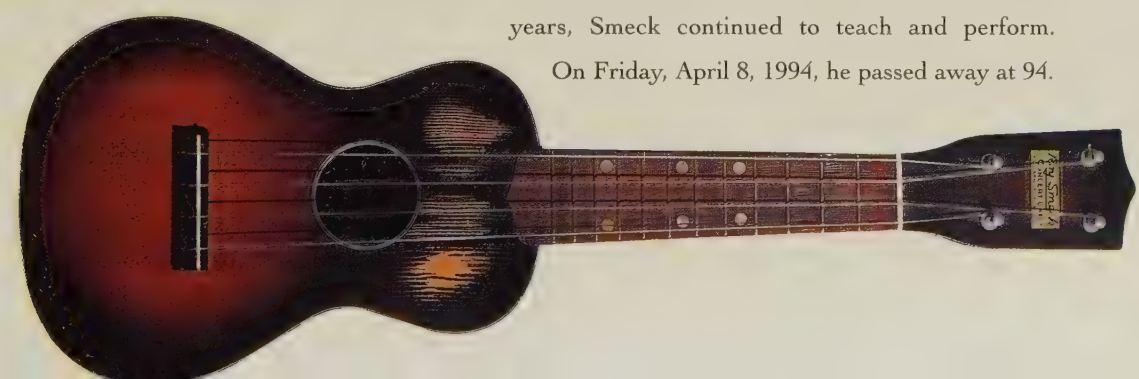
Other "Smeckisms" included playing the uke like a violin and playing it upside down, blowing in the soundhole like someone would on a soda bottle, spinning the uke, imitating a train, strumming the uke off his knee and swinging it in such a way that he would create a vibrato sound. One big show stopper was a uke-harmonica duet—holding the harmonica in his mouth without a brace!

While known initially on the vaudeville circuit, Smeck eventually wound up with his own five-day-a-week radio show on WOR in New York, where he gave his listeners a 15 minute lesson on a different musical instrument each day. He performed on all the major TV variety shows (Jack Paar's, Ed Sullivan's, Steve Allen's) and even made a number of short films for some of the Hollywood studios. One of these short films, *Farewell Blues*, made for Paramount in the late forties, was the first to show a multi-tracked Smeck playing the guitar, lap steel, banjo and ukulele simultaneously.

At the height of his popularity, Smeck was in demand as a session player (for artists like Gene Autry) and made dozens of his own recordings. Two notable recordings that featured Smeck's ukulele playing are *The Magic Ukulele of Roy Smeck*, ABC-Paramount, and *Roy Smeck and His Magic Uke*, Kapp. Both are hard to find, but absolutely essential for any good uke record collection. He also published over thirty ukulele instruction books and songbooks.

One of Smeck's greatest ongoing legacies is the many lines of musical instruments produced under his name. The Harmony Company in Chicago manufactured and sold millions of Smeck ukes. In particular, the pear-shaped Vita Uke with the seal cutout soundholes is a great "player" and quite collectable (page 61).

A 1982 documentary about Smeck's life entitled *The Wizard of the Strings* was nominated for an Academy Award. Throughout much of his later years, Smeck continued to teach and perform. On Friday, April 8, 1994, he passed away at 94.

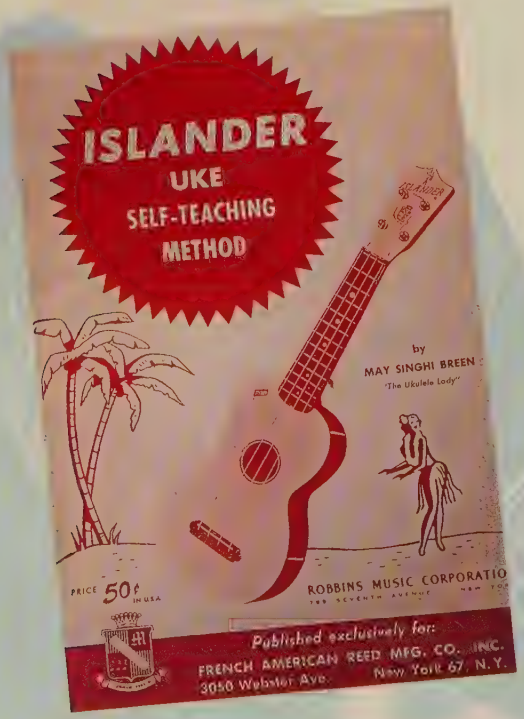


May Singhi Breen

(D. DECEMBER 19, 1970)

Also known as "The Ukulele Lady," MAY SINGHI BREEN devoted much of her life toward the recognition of the ukulele as a legitimate musical instrument. Breen played a key role in establishing that recognition with the Musician's Union. Her career was sparked in 1922 when she received a ukulele as a Christmas gift. Because she didn't know how to play the uke, she tried to exchange it for a bathrobe at the department store where it was purchased. When this proved unsuccessful, she decided to take uke lessons.

Obviously, Breen was a big believer in the uke as a solo instrument. In her method book entitled *May Singhi Breen New Ukulele Method for Beginners and Advanced Students* (Robbins Music Corp.), she promotes the concept of chord soloing with her slogan "UKE CAN PLAY THE MELODY."



COURTESY OF THE ESTATE OF MAY SINGHI BREEN DEROSE.

Breen and her husband, songwriter Peter DeRose ("Deep Purple," "Just Say Aloha") appeared on the radio (NBC and WJZ) for 16 years as *The Sweethearts of the Air*. She was also a successful songwriter and arranger; many pieces of sheet music include the credit of "ukulele arrangement by May Singhi Breen." In her bid to show how far the uke could be taken, she wrote a 16-minute rhapsody for uke and performed it at the Aeolian Hall in New York with the Paul Whiteman Orchestra.

A passionate teacher of the ukulele (she had her studio and company, Uke Trades Publishing Co., at 16 W. 72nd St. in New York City), Breen was a booster of forming ukulele-oriented clubs. In her *New Ukulele Method*, she writes: "It [the uke] should head the list of every recreational program in schools, camps and Girls' and Boys' Clubs in educational centers. Group-playing leads to enjoyment for young and old. Form clubs—play in groups—and watch the progress. I wish I could tell you of the many lasting relationships that have resulted through the medium of the groups, which I had the pleasure of forming and training."

Arthur Godfrey

(AUGUST 31, 1903–MARCH 16, 1983)

For three months in 1950, ARTHUR GODFREY had a short-lived television show called *Arthur Godfrey and His Ukulele* where he actually gave uke lessons to his television audience. While that show may not have been a big hit, at the beginning of 1949 Godfrey was the first performer in television history to have two top-rated TV shows running simultaneously—*Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* and *Arthur Godfrey and His Friends*. At his peak popularity in the early 1950s, his nine radio and television shows were enjoyed by 40 million fans per week and contributed an astonishing 10 million dollars a year in advertising, or about 12% of CBS's total annual advertising revenue. No wonder it was said that Godfrey was the most valuable single property of the Columbia Broadcasting System—even more valuable than its president or board of directors.

Godfrey learned to play the ukulele in the early twenties from a Hawaiian shipmate while in the Navy at Great Lakes Training Station. As early as 1929, he was giving uke lessons on the radio in Baltimore. It was in January 1950 that he made an impulsive decision to promote his favorite musical instrument on his radio and TV shows. Every week, Godfrey would enter the nation's living rooms dressed in his Hawaiian shirt, strumming a ukulele and singing songs like "Makin' Love Ukulele Style." In addition, one of his regulars on *...Friends* was Hawaiian singer and uke player Haleloke. Godfrey was a true bridge between the first wave of the uke and what was to be his self-created craze.

As a result of this priceless exposure, the ukulele experienced a major revival in the fifties. Godfrey endorsed the famous plastic Maccaferri "Islander" ukulele and helped to sell nine million of them at $5.95 each. Since 1929, uke sales had been running about 5000 units a year; when Godfrey gave his

JAZZ FOR THE PEOPLE—ARTHUR GODFREY & HIS FRIENDS, SIGNATURE. THIS DELIGHTFUL RECORD FEATURES GODFREY HAVING A PARTICULARLY GOOD TIME SINGING AND SWINGIN' HIS WAY THROUGH A GROUP OF STANDARDS. ESPECIALLY NOTABLE IS GODFREY'S "JAZZY" BARITONE UKULELE PLAYING THROUGHOUT.

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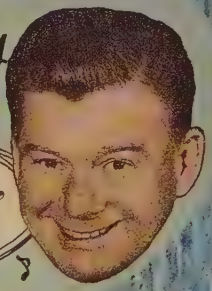
VEGA "ARTHUR GODFREY" BARITONE UKE.

This box contains 16 page Song Book and

Arthur Godfrey

UKE PLAYER



Snap it on . . .

PLAY LIKE A "PRO" WITHOUT LESSONS

"blessing" on the uke, 5000 ukes were sold in a few days. It was determined that his six months of uke enthusiasm on his nine weekly shows resulted in sales of 1,700,000 instruments. In her *New Ukulele Method*, May Singhi Breen writes that "...thanks to the one and only Arthur Godfrey, the ukulele is now called 'the family instrument of America.'" Godfrey's message was hard to ignore: "If a kid has a uke in his hand, he's not going to get in much trouble."

In addition to his broadcasts, recordings and live performances with his uke, Godfrey made one other key contribution to the ukulele: It was Godfrey who asked Eddie Connors to design what later became the baritone ukulele.

George Formby

(MAY 26, 1904–MARCH 6, 1961)

Born in Lancashire, England, GEORGE HOY BOOTH was the son of a successful Edwardian music hall comedian whose stage name was George Formby. When the elder Formby died in 1921, the younger George decided to take over his father's act. In a backstage dressing room eighteen months later, Booth met a fellow performer strumming a banjulele. A cross between a banjo and a uke, the banjulele plays like a uke but sounds like a banjo.

In need of money, the owner sold it to Booth, who immediately began to teach himself how to play. (Booth was also intrigued by the instrument due to Cliff "Ukulele Ike" Edwards who was popular at this time.) On a bet from his fellow entertainers that he didn't have the nerve to put the banjulele in his act, Booth performed with it at the Alhambra Theatre in Barnsley, England and brought the house down. In this instrument, Booth found what was to become one of the two crucial partners in his career. Soon after, he felt confident enough to take on his father's stage name and he became the second GEORGE FORMBY.

The other key to Formby's career was Beryl Ingham, a dancer. It was after they married that his career really took off. Under her watchful eye, Formby became one of the most popular and highly paid entertainers in England. In addition to his live act, Formby appeared with his banjulele in twenty-two hit movies. The key to his charm was that he reminded the public of the boy next door—lacking in sex appeal, but very funny. His was a "smile of perpetual wonder at the joyous incomprehensibility of the universe."

As a self-taught player, Formby had his own unique syncopated strumming that still remains difficult to duplicate. He also was famous for hits like "Leaning on a Lamp Post" and naughtier songs like "With My Little Ukulele in My Hand."

GEORGE FORMBY
COURTESY OF DECCA RECORDS.

OPPOSITE: ARTHUR GODFREY. FROM THE COLLECTION OF DESOTO BROWN.

The Keech "Banjulele" Banjo.

The Banjulele

The banjulele or banjo-uke was invented in 1917 by Hawaii-born Alvin Keech. At the time, Keech was looking for a way to make the uke louder and sturdier. Alvin's "ukulele soloist" brother, Kelvin, also helped to promote the banjo-uke, and by 1919 the Keech banjulele was being manufactured in Los Angeles and England. His invention proved very popular, and companies such as Gibson, Ludwig and Harmony designed and manufactured their own banjo-ukes. Their instruments usually featured a uke fingerboard married to a small banjo body, were tuned like ukes, and used regular ukulele strings.

Lyle Ritz

(JANUARY 10, 1930)

With three albums of jazz ukulele, LYLE RITZ has secured his place in uke history. The first two of these remarkable records, *How About Uke?* and *50th State Jazz*, were released on Verve Records in the fifties, demonstrating brilliantly how far this simple four-stringed instrument could be taken.

Playing a tenor ukulele tuned down to guitar tuning with the top string up an octave in the traditional "my dog has fleas" tuning, Ritz (with well-known studio musicians on horns, flute, bass and drums) tackles some of the most challenging jazz standard tunes like "Moonlight In Vermont," "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," and "Lulu's Back In Town." As the liner notes on *How About Uke?* inform us: "No quarter is asked; Lyle meets jazz on its own ground, and the tricks

usually associated and heard with a novel instrument are conspicuously absent."

Part of his musical fearlessness on the uke may be that Ritz did not come to the uke by way of the guitar or other fretted instruments. As a boy growing up in Pittsburgh, he studied violin for ten years.

It was as a salesman at the Southern California Music Company in downtown Los Angeles that he discovered the ukulele. Part of his job was the demonstration and sale of miscellaneous instruments. Thanks once again to Arthur Godfrey, Ritz was demonstrating a lot of ukes. Gravitating to a Gibson tenor, he became more and more enamored with the instrument. (The uke that is pictured on his two Verve recordings is a Gibson tenor that was specially "cutaway" to allow for high-up fretwork.) Today, he will tell you that it was the "sound" of the tenor uke that first captivated him, and that it was "my size instrument."

Despite a brief flirtation with the guitar and even the tuba and trumpet, Ritz became known for a much larger instrument—string bass. As an A-list studio string bass player in the sixties and seventies, he contributed to some 5,000 recordings, including "Good Vibrations," "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" and "I've Got You Babe." Even now, as a resident of Hawaii, Ritz is more likely to be playing bass, although today he admits he has always had a special *simpatico* feeling for the uke.

50th State Jazz—Lyle Ritz and His Jazz Ukulele, 1959, Verve Records. This record has more of a Hawaiian theme with songs like "Blue Hawaii" and "On The Beach At Waikiki." The uke playing is, of course, jaw dropping and the other players are equally fine. Courtesy of Verve Records.

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How About Uke?—Lyle Ritz Plays Jazz Ukulele, 1958, Verve Records. The first of two jazz uke albums Ritz cut for Verve. Ritz takes the uke into uncharted territory with remarkably sophisticated chordal movement and inspired single-note solos. The record includes standards like "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," "Tangerine," and "How About You," as well as an original, "Ritz Cracker." Courtesy of Verve Records.

—

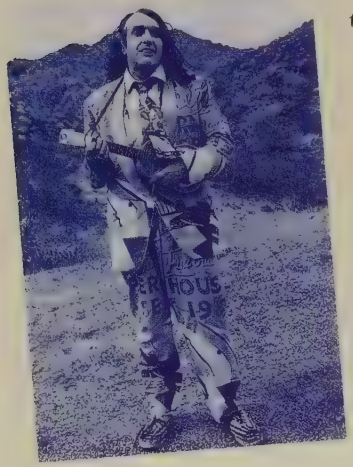
Lyle Ritz/Time...Ukulele Jazz with Bass, Drums & Percussion, 1995, Roy Sakuma Productions, Inc. This recording is an answered prayer for Ritz fans. Featured are re-recordings of some of the standards he cut with his Verve Records ("Lulu's Back in Town," "Blue Hawaii," "Little Girl Blue," "I'm Beginning to See the Light"), plus some new tunes like Billy Joel's "Just the Way You Are" and the delightful Ritz-penned "Time Has Done a Funny Thing to Me." Courtesy of Roy Sakuma Productions.

In 1994, Ritz and Ohta-San were playing their ukes together on tour and in the studio, and in November of 1995, Ritz released a uke recording entitled *Lyle Ritz/Time....* No doubt what drives Ritz today is the same thing that drove him to make his two legendary records: "...to find out what can be accomplished with the ukulele in jazz and to give the instrument real stature in contemporary music of serious nature" (liner notes on *50th State Jazz*).

Tiny Tim

(APRIL 12, 1933–NOVEMBER 30, 1996)

TINY TIM was born Herbert Khaury in Manhattan's Park East Hospital. He was more closely associated with the ukulele than anyone else in the world. His mother, Tillie, came from an orthodox Jewish family, and his father, Butros Khaury, was a Lebanese textile worker. Young Herbert Khaury grew up in Washington Heights, New York.



TINY TIM
COURTESY OF ROUNDER RECORDS

Tiny Tim's fascination with the ukulele was inspired by another great "uke" personality—Arthur Godfrey. In the Tiny Tim biography by Harry Stein, Tiny admits that "it was because Mr. Godfrey played the ukulele that I began to play myself." Tiny goes on to say that he learned the chords from a book Godfrey wrote with Don Ball called *You Too Can Play The Ukulele*. One of his first ukes was an "Arthur Godfrey" plastic uke that he bought for six dollars. (Tiny Tim didn't meet Arthur Godfrey until 1968, where at a roast for Walter Cronkite, Godfrey said to him, "So, we finally meet.")

Early on, Tiny Tim applied his knowledge of the uke to learn to play the tenor guitar, an instrument that was far more mainstream for the time. However, he went back to the ukulele because it was easier to travel with, especially as he got thrown out of one audition after another. In fact, it's because Tiny was "booted out" of these auditions so quickly that he began his tradition of carrying his uke in a shopping bag (rather than a case) for a fast exit.

Considering the large physical presence of "Tiny" Tim, his long hair, and his unusual falsetto voice, the ukulele somehow completed the picture in a comical way. Tiny's repertoire was made up mostly of turn-of-the-century and Tin Pan Alley songs, which were exceptionally well-served by uke accompaniment.

After struggling for years in Greenwich Village clubs, Tiny attracted the attention of Reprise Records. In 1968, he cut his first album, *God Bless Tiny Tim*,

FOREGROUND: UKULELE ONCE OWNED BY TINY TIM, NOW IN AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

CENTER RIGHT: DETAIL FROM *GOD BLESS TINY TIM*—TINY TIM, REPRISE RECORDS. TINY'S FIRST AND BIGGEST ALBUM. FEATURING HIS HIT VERSION OF "TIP-TOE THRU' THE TULIPS WITH ME," FALSETTO, UKE-STRUMMING AND ALL. THIS ALBUM IS TRULY AN ORIGINAL. PRODUCED BY THE FAMED ROCK PRODUCER RICHARD PERRY.

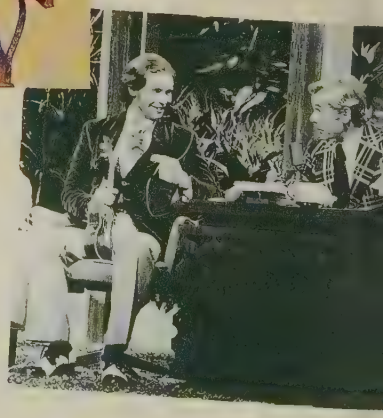
which featured the huge hit "Tiptoe Thru' the Tulips with Me" (inspired—falsetto and all—by the 1929 original version by Nick Lucas). This album went as high as #7 on the *Billboard* album chart, and led Tiny to his brilliant but short-lived television career. In addition to appearances on *Merv Griffin* and *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In,* Tiny made true television history on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson. Over the course of about two years, Tiny appeared as a *Tonight Show* guest more than a dozen times. His famous wedding ceremony to Miss Vicky on December 17, 1969, attracted a record 40 million viewers. In pictures of the ceremony, Tiny is holding Miss Vicky in one hand and his ukulele in the other.

While Tiny Tim's "fifteen minutes" ended pretty much after his wedding, he still continued to perform and record regularly until shortly before his death. In 1996, Tiny released a new CD on Rounder Records entitled *Girl.* He also guest-starred on the television show *Roseanne.* In concert, Tiny's uke playing was more of the three-chord variety, but his knowledge and passion for the great songwriters and singers of Tin Pan Alley was remarkable.

Ian Whitcomb
(JULY 10, 1941)

Tiny Tim is not the only guest of *The Tonight Show* to appear with a ukulele. In 1976, IAN WHITCOMB, originally from Surrey, England, also shared that distinction. While Whitcomb is still best known for his self-penned 1965 U.S. Top Ten hit "You Turn Me On," his real love has always been the roots of popular music, in particular, ragtime and the songs from

LET THE REST OF THE WORLD GO BY—IAN WHITCOMB AND HIS BUNGALOW BOYS (INTRODUCING: REGINA), 1991, ITW INDUSTRIES. A PARTICULARLY GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE WHITCOMB SOUND. FEATURES PLENTY OF GREAT TIN PAN ALLEY TUNES LIKE "MY CUTIE'S DUE AT TWO-TO-TWO TODAY," AS WELL AS A WICKED TANGO VERSION OF ROY ORBISON'S "OH! PRETTY WOMAN," WITH UKE, OF COURSE! COURTESY OF ITW INDUSTRIES



IAN ON *THE TONIGHT SHOW* COURTESY OF JOHNNY CARSON PRODUCTIONS.

the Tin Pan Alley era. Now living in Los Angeles, it's only fitting that Whitcomb maintains a busy schedule performing many of these songs on the ukulele.

Inspired by George Formby, Whitcomb picked up the uke at age fourteen. While he began playing the piano at an earlier age, the uke captivated him completely. When asked in 1996 what it was about the uke that he liked most, Whitcomb referred to its "jolly plangency" [resounding sound] and "bounce." As a performer, he feels playing the piano on stage is akin to being "stuck at a desk," while the far more portable uke allows him to "roam around." Whitcomb also admits that as a college student the uke was perfect for strumming in a car (as a passenger, we hope), and for serenading the fairer sex in the "secluded dunes" of some beach singing "You Were Meant For Me."

In addition to his many live performances, Whitcomb has a weekly public radio show where he plays a lot of his favorite music from long ago and provides insight into the history and development of the various styles.

IAN WHITCOMB

As a recording artist, he has released a number of highly-recommended CDs and cassettes that feature his uke strumming. As Whitcomb sings in "Do I Love You?—Yes, I Do!," from his 1991 release, *Let the Rest of the World Go By*, he replies, "I'll tell it to you daily, on my ukulele."

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

One of the brightest spots in the uke scene of the 1990s is the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain. Hugely successful in Japan, the Orchestra has gone, at times, without a record contract in its own country.

A FIST FULL OF UKULELES—THE UKULELE ORCHESTRA OF GREAT BRITAIN, 1993. RELEASED ON THEIR OWN LABEL, THIS RECORDING SHOWCASES THE ORCHESTRA IN ALL OF THEIR "DEPRAVED" GLORY. A GOOFY MIX OF CLASSICAL, NOVELTY AND CONTEMPORARY POP MUSIC. NOT TO BE MISSED ARE PRINCE'S "KISS," "JOHNNY B. GOODE," AND FELLOW UKE PLAYER JONI MITCHELL'S "A CASE OF YOU." COURTESY OF GEORGE HINCHLIFFE.

The Orchestra began life in 1985 with George Hinchliffe and Andy Astle, two art school chums. The pair had formed a performance art group called the Bronte Brothers that featured a lot of props and musical instruments. Dreaming of somehow being able to do an act that was more "portable," they stumbled onto the idea of working ukuleles into the act. From that idea arose a group of twelve ukulele players, under the direction of Hinchliffe and Kitty Lux, who have taken the uke into the avant-garde. In the liner notes to their 1993 recording, *A Fist Full of Ukuleles*, they refer to their "depraved musicology" that has "alienated some traditionalists."

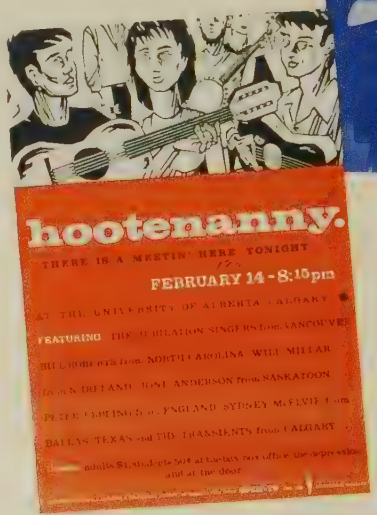
The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain.
Courtesy of George Hinchliffe.

Since then, the Orchestra has taken its unique mix of deconstructed twenties songs, classical music, show tunes, and rock 'n' roll standards around the world. A typical set might include uke renditions of "Tonight" from *West Side Story*, Aretha Franklin's "Natural Woman," Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture," The Troggs' "Wild Thing," and Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode" with the lyric changed from "guitar" to "ukulele." Performances have included stops at the Chicago Music Festival, Hyde Park and Tokyo, Japan, where *A Fist Full Of Ukuleles* is a big hit.

Uke 'n' Roll

Joni Mitchell began her musical career with a baritone uke. Tracy Chapman and Stephen Stills also point to the ukulele as their first musical instrument. Of course, former Beatle George Harrison is a major uke fan, as is former Fleetwood Mac guitarist/producer Lindsey Buckingham.

Joni Mitchell
Photograph courtesy of
Lyndon Smith



The Essential Ukulele Record List

There have been a number of outstanding records that feature the ukulele. Unfortunately, many of them are out of print. Unless they are re-released, the best chance you have of finding most of the albums listed below is to call around to out-of-print record stores and go through boxes of used records at flea markets and garage/tag sales. Some of the artists listed are still putting out recordings (most in CD or cassette formats), and these are a little easier to find. Current records from Hawaii are usually available at record stores on the Islands. The list below represents records that the author has been able to find, and is by no means definitive.

It is, however, a good place to start.

Happy hunting and listening.

John Kameaaloha Almeida—Strum Your Ukulele, *49th State Hawaii Record Co. c/o Cord International/Hana Ola Records.*

Eddie Bush—A Man and His Ukulele, *Sea Shell Records.*

Cliff Edwards—Ukulele Ike Sings Again, *Disneyland Records.*

Cliff Edwards—Singing in the Rain, *1995, Audiophile Records.*

George Formby—With My Ukulele *(compilation), 1981, Decca.*

Arthur Godfrey & His Friends—Jazz for the People, *Signature.*

How About Uke? Wizards Of The Ukulele, *Eddie Kamae, Ohta-San, Jesse Kalima, Eddie Bush, Lehua Records.*

Ka'au Crater Boys—On Fire!, *1994, Roy Sakuma Productions.*

Jesse Kalima—Jess Uke, *SL5006, Sounds of Hawaii (c/o Lehua Records).*

Jesse Kalima—Luau Time, *SL5004, Sounds of Hawaii (c/o Lehua Records).*

Eddie Kamae—Heart of the Ukulele, *MS 3002, Mahalo Records (c/o Lehua Records).*

Eddie Kamae and the Sons of Hawaii—This Is Eddie Kamae, *Hula Records.*

Israel Kamakawiwo'ole—Facing Future, *1993, Bigboy Record Company.*

Moe Keale—Imagine, *1996, Pa'ani Records.*

Johnny Marvin: A Voice of the '20s, *1987, Take Two Records.*

King Bennie Nawahi—Hot Hawaiian Guitar, *1928-1949, Yazoo Records.*

Ohta-San—Pacific Pot-Pourri, *SL7005, Sounds of Hawaii (c/o Lehua Records).*

Ohta-San—Song for Anna, *Ae3M Records.*

Ohta-San—Ukulele Isle, *Decca Records.*

Ohta-San—Where Is My Love Tonight, *1993, Roy Sakuma Productions, Inc.*

Lyle Ritz—How About Uke?, Lyle Ritz Plays Jazz Ukulele, *1958, Verve Records.*

Lyle Ritz—50th State Jazz, Lyle Ritz and His Jazz Ukulele, *1959, Verve Records.*

Lyle Ritz—Time, *1995, Roy Sakuma Productions, Inc.*

Roy Smeck—The Magic Ukulele of Roy Smeck, *ABC-Paramount.*

Roy Smeck and His Magic Uke, *Kapp Records.*

Tiny Tim—God Bless Tiny Tim, *1968, Reprise Records.*

Johnny Ukulele—Favorite Selections by Johnny Ukulele, *Capitol Records.*

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain—A Fist Full of Ukuleles, *1993, Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain.*

Ukulele Stylings 1 & 2, *1995, 1996, Pa'ani Records.*

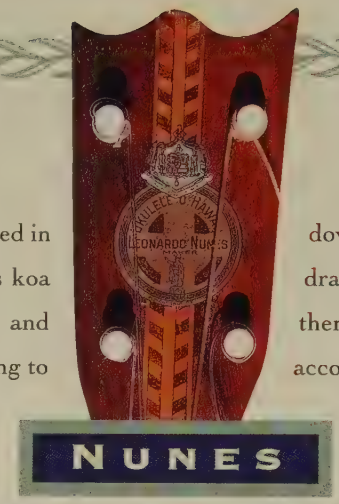
Nelson Waikiki—Ukulele Stylist, *Tradewinds Records.*

Ian Whitcomb and His Bungalow Boys (Introducing: Regina)—Let the Rest of the World Go By, *1991, ITW Industries.*

Made in Hawaii

Between 1880 and the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition, virtually all ukulele manufacturing was being done in Hawaii. By 1888, all three of the Portuguese woodworkers who came over on the *Ravenscrag* (see Chapter One, *The History of The Ukulele*) had opened ukulele shops. These men, Augusto Dias, Manuel Nunes and José do Espirito Santo, were hand-crafting fine koa ukes, some with a high degree of inlaid mother-of-pearl and other decorative touches. Their early ukes sold for as little as $3, which at the time was the equivalent of a month's salary for a typical sugar plantation worker.

The Great Ukulele Manufacturers

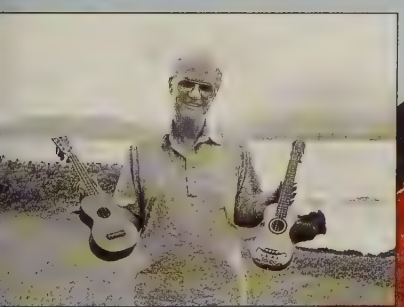


Then and now, the dominant wood used in the manufacture of Hawaiian ukes is koa wood, a large evergreen hardwood and member of the acacia family. According to M. Nunes & Sons' 1910 promotional materials, koa was found only in Hawaii and almost entirely on the island of Hawaii, the largest and most southerly of the island chain. Growing primarily at elevations of several thousand feet, koa was remarkable for its rich colorings of brown and gold and its beautiful grain. The choicest koa was "curly grained," and a great deal of effort went into hunting down trees with this characteristic. In the early years, it could take weeks to find these trees, cut them down, turn the wood into lumber and drag it out to a trail or road where it could then be carried by dray animals. Then, according to a 1916 Nunes ad, the koa wood was "naturally seasoned in Hawaii for years—not kiln dried."

According to his advertisements, Manuel Nunes was the "inventor" of the ukulele in 1879. By 1910, Manuel Nunes and his sons were making a full line of ukuleles, taropatches and steel guitars. The prices ranged from $10 for a plain koa wood uke to $35 for an "extra fancy curly koa wood" taropatch with inlay around the edges and sound hole. The six-string uke was another variation, with a doubling of two of the strings.

Koa trees. Hawaii, circa 1920.
Courtesy of Frederick W. McConville, Bishop Museum.

Left: Leonardo Nunes' six-string; Leonardo Nunes' Style 4 uke; Early Manuel Nunes' soprano uke; Manuel Nunes' taropatch.



Leslie Nunes, great grandson of Manuel Nunes, holding a 1910 Manuel Nunes 8-string ukulele on the left and an 1850 braguinha made by Octavianno Nunes on the right. Photograph by Elizabeth Maihock Beloff

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Above: Martin Taropatch

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Manuel Nunes taropatch

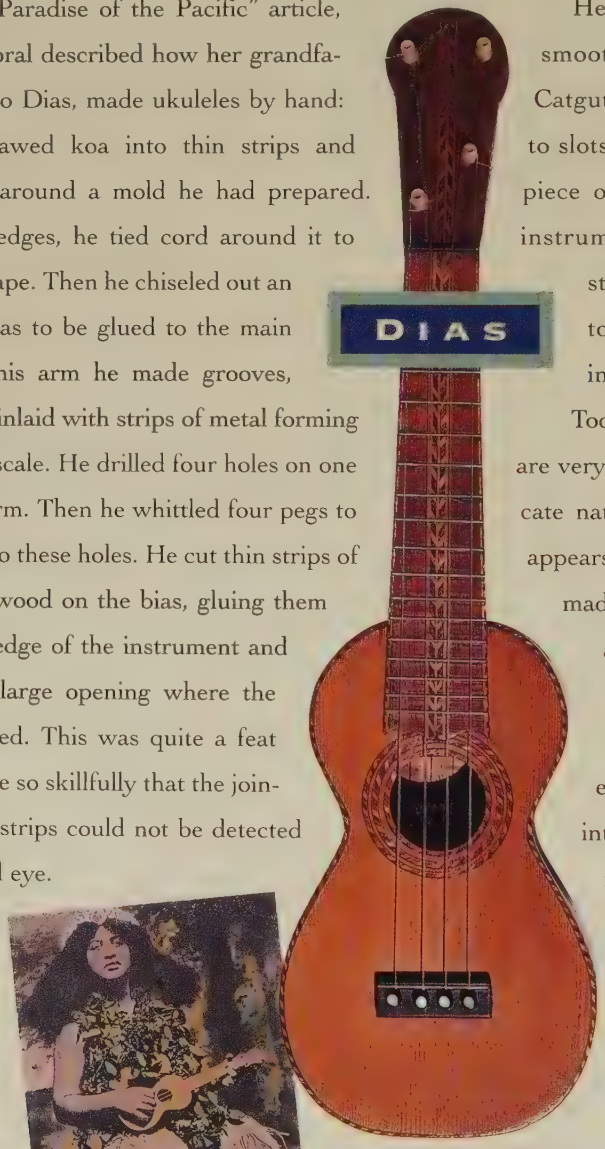
The Taropatch

The eight-string taropatch (or taro-patch fiddle) is a descendant of yet another Portuguese instrument known as the *rajao*. Noticeably larger than the braguinha and having five strings, the deeper-toned *rajao* was carried around by the field workers who enjoyed playing the instrument on their work breaks. The *rajao* was renamed the taropatch fiddle in honor of the taro plant whose root, when crushed, becomes poi, the Hawaiian food staple. Over time the *rajao* went from being a five-string instrument to a larger eight-string ukulele with four double courses of strings. It should be noted, however, that the taropatch is played and tuned like a soprano uke, just as a twelve-string guitar is played like the six-string version. In addition to Nunes, Martin made mahogany and koa taropatches between 1918 and 1931. Because of the increased difficulty in tuning as well as the pressing down of eight strings as opposed to four, the taropatch was far less popular than the standard uke.

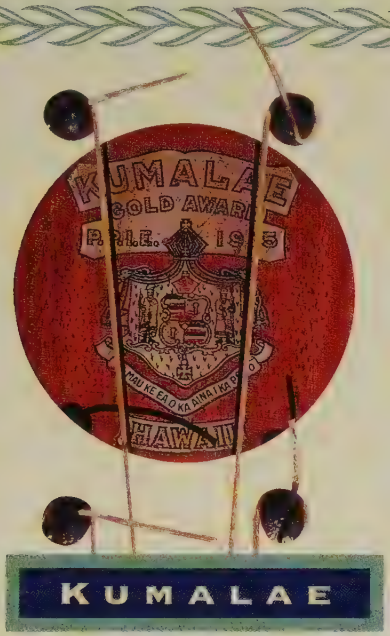
In a 1946 "Paradise of the Pacific" article, Elma T. Cabral described how her grandfather, Augusto Dias, made ukuleles by hand: "Grandpa sawed koa into thin strips and wrapped it around a mold he had prepared. Gluing the edges, he tied cord around it to keep it in shape. Then he chiseled out an 'arm' that was to be glued to the main body. On this arm he made grooves, which were inlaid with strips of metal forming the musical scale. He drilled four holes on one end of the arm. Then he whittled four pegs to fit tightly into these holes. He cut thin strips of contrasting wood on the bias, gluing them around the edge of the instrument and around the large opening where the sound escaped. This was quite a feat and was done so skillfully that the joining of these strips could not be detected by the naked eye.

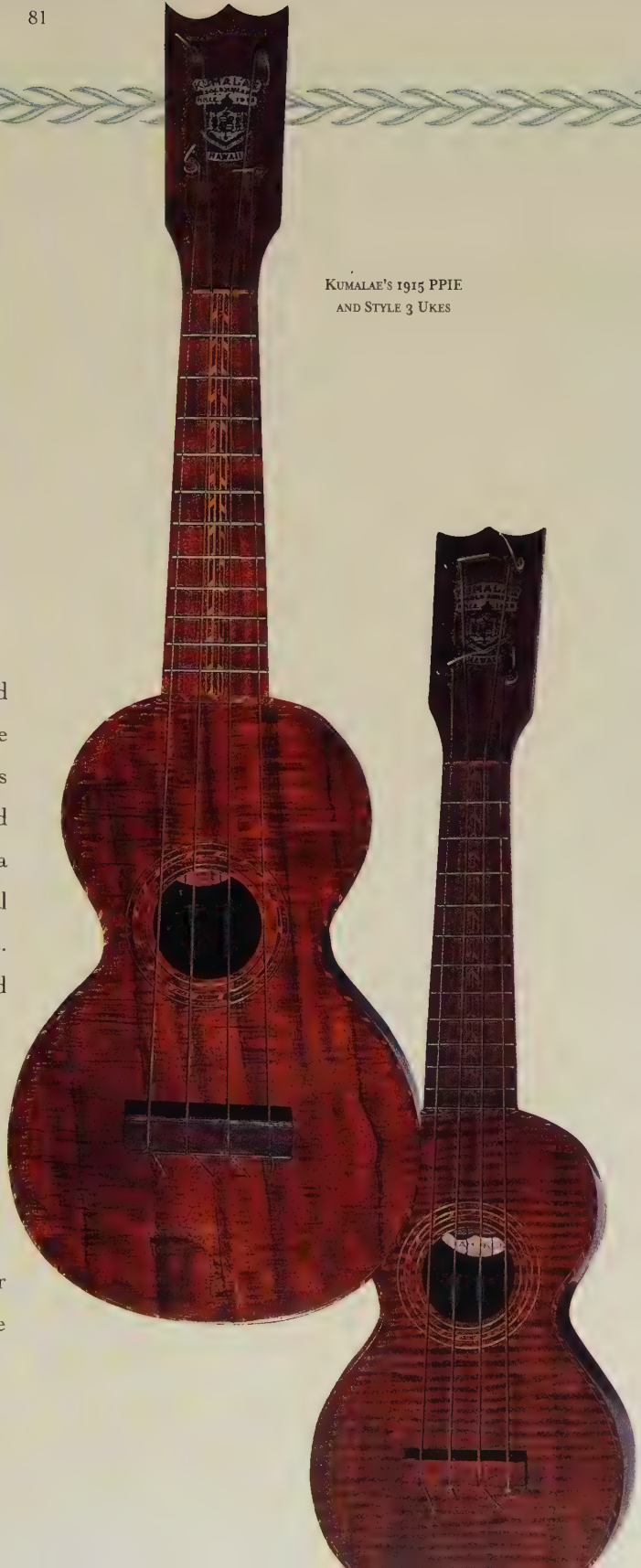
He sanded the instrument to satiny smoothness before he applied varnish. Catgut strings were knotted and attached to slots in the pegs and to those on a raised piece of wood on the opposite end of the instrument. After testing the scale and strumming a few chords to test its tone, Grandpa applied his seal on the inside of the instrument."

Today, ukuleles from the 1880s to 1910 are very scarce. This is due in part to the delicate nature of these instruments, but it also appears that comparatively few ukes were made in those early years. By 1900, Dias and Santo had stopped making ukes. By 1910, however, the demand from Hawaii and the Mainland was strong enough that Nunes brought his sons into the business and they continued to make fine ukuleles until the mid 1930s.



AN EXTREMELY RARE DIAS SOPRANO UKE (LATE 1800S).





Kumalae's 1915 PPIE and Style 3 Ukes

In 1911, an ivory carver, Jonah Kumalae, started making ukes at the rate of 300 per month. Like most of the ukuleles made during this period, Kumalae ukes were considered finely made musical instruments. Kumalae took a booth at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition to showcase his ukes and taropatches. As a result of his fine craftsmanship he received the Gold Award, which, according to the headstock and inside label of this one uke, was a source of great pride.

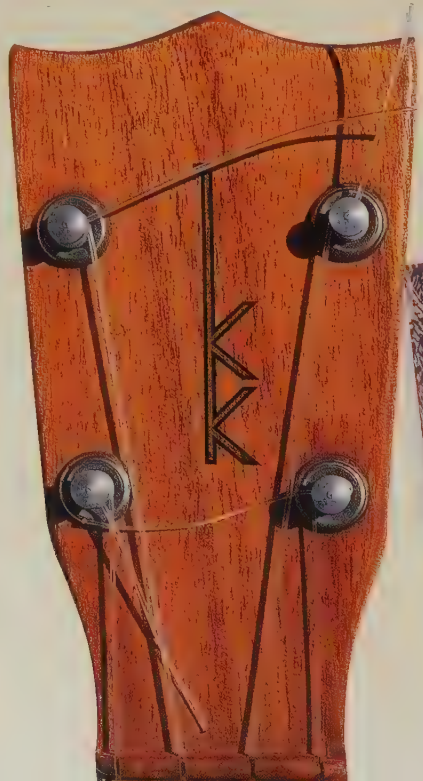
In the heyday of the 1930s, Kumalae's operation was a half-acre in size and employed 50 people. However, like many other uke manufacturers of the time, Kumalae closed later due to a lack of interest in the business from the succeeding generation.

KAMAKA

Today, the only early Hawaiian ukulele manufacturer still in business is Kamaka Hawaii, Inc. In 1910, Samuel K. Kamaka apprenticed himself to Manuel Nunes and learned the trade. Then in 1916 he established his own company in his basement workshop. By 1921, Kamaka had hired additional employees and moved the business to a larger space. In 1959, Kamaka moved to its current address, a two-story factory at 550 South Street in Honolulu. Hand crafting as many as 4,000 instruments each year, Kamaka specializes in a variety of different koa ukuleles, including the standard soprano, concert, tenor and baritone models. They also make six-string and eight-string Lili'u ukes as well as the famous "pineapple ukulele" that Sam designed in 1916. This particular uke has a bigger and warmer sound due to the larger body cavity, and some of the early painted versions are highly collectable.

SAM JR. AND FRED KAMAKA
PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZABETH MAIHOCK BELOFF

One of the most interesting side notes to the Kamaka story is the fact that half of the twenty-two employees are hearing-impaired or deaf. Rather than being a handicap, it turns out that these uke builders are able to sense the perfect thickness of the koa by thumping the wood and feeling the vibration with their very experienced fingers.



According to legend, Sam Kamaka tried to make ukuleles out of twelve cigar boxes. Out of the twelve boxes, Kamaka was able to make seven good ukes. Two of them are pictured here.

Pineapple uke with painted front.

Left: Detail of Pineapple Style 3.

Mainland Manufacturers

They Came from Nazareth and Kalamazoo

Of all the Mainland ukulele manufacturers, the Martin name stands above all others. Established in 1833 by German émigré C. F. Martin, today the MARTIN GUITAR COMPANY of Nazareth, Pennsylvania, is world-renowned for their exceptional acoustic guitars. Nonetheless, the ukuleles that Martin made (and continues to make on special order) are without peer. Ironically, many of the great Hawaiian players have a special place in their hearts for ukes made by Martin.

Although the very first Martin ukuleles were put on the market in 1916, Frank Henry Martin (grandson of founder C. F. Martin) was already experimenting with uke-making as early as 1907. These experimental ukes were built more like small guitars with too much bracing and spruce tops. Not surprisingly, the tone was less than great and these ukes were not well received. The second time out, Martin used mahogany, which required less bracing, and the tone was much improved. Martin became so successful at making fine ukuleles that, during the peak years between 1916 and 1930, Martin doubled its work space and added employees to handle the uke demand.

Between 1916 and 1923, Martin made soprano mahogany ukes primarily. Then in 1923 they began making both mahogany and koa soprano-sized ukuleles in all styles. The easiest way to think of Martin uke styles is that the higher the number, the fancier the instrument. The Style 0, which was advertised as "plain, neat, serviceable," came only in mahogany and had the least amount of ornamentation. Styles 1 and 2, which also could be had in koa wood, were essentially the same as the Style 0 but with progressively more binding.

The Styles 3 and 5 were considered more for the professional player and are noted for their 17-fret, ebony fingerboard. The Style 3 featured even more decoration than the Style 2, and the Style 5K (the K is for koa) is considered by collectors to be one of the "holiest of grails," with elaborate pearl inlay in the fingerboard and in the headstock. (The mahogany Style 5 was only made in 1941 and 1942.)

Martin also made a full line of different-sized ukes

Martin Model O

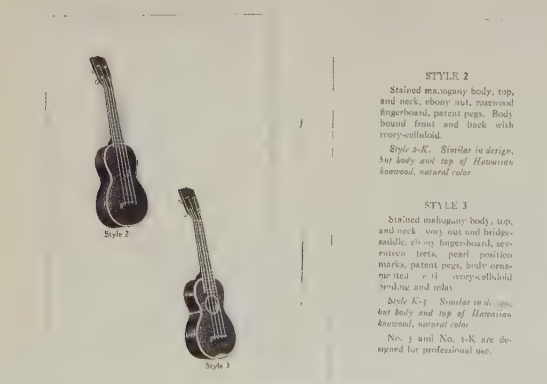
3K

5K

Oliver Ditson Dreadnought Style 3.

including the concert (beginning in 1925), tenor (1928) and baritone (1960). They also experimented with taropatches (made between 1918 and 1932) and ten-string uke-like instruments known as "tiples" (from 1923, with some versions still in the Martin line).

Martin also made a variety of ukuleles for other companies, including the Oliver Ditson Co., S.S. Stewart, Wurlitzer, Montgomery Ward, H.A. Weymann, Wm. J. Smith, Jenkins and Belltone companies.



STYLE 2

Stained mahogany body, top, and neck, ebony nut, rosewood fingerboard, patent pegs. Body bound front and back with ivory-celluloid.

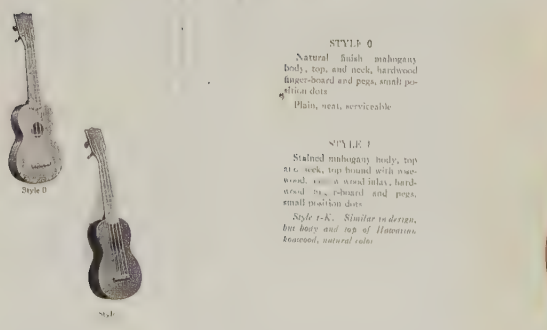
Style 2-K. Similar in design, but body and top of Hawaiian koawood, natural color

STYLE 3

Stained mahogany body, top, and neck, ivory nut and bridge-saddle, ebony finger-board, seventeen frets, pearl position marks, patent pegs, body ornamented [illegible] ivory-celluloid binding and inlay.

Style K-3. Similar in design, but body and top of Hawaiian koawood, natural color

No. 3 and No. 3-K are designed for professional use.



STYLE 0

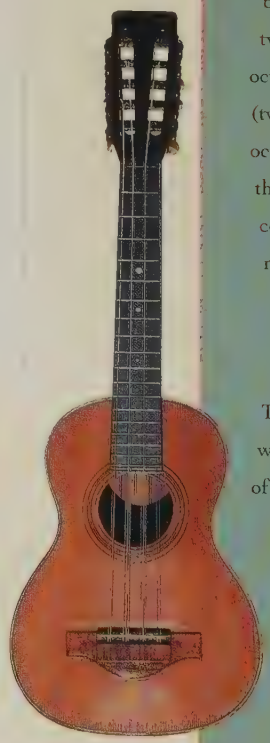
Natural finish mahogany body, top, and neck, hardwood finger-board and pegs, small position dots

Plain, neat, serviceable

STYLE 1

Stained mahogany body, top and neck, top bound with rosewood, with a wood inlay, hardwood finger-board and pegs, small position dots

Style 1-K. Similar in design, but body and top of Hawaiian koawood, natural color

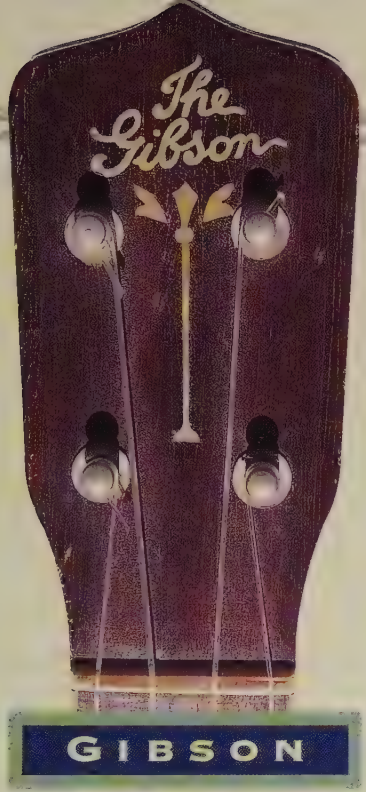


William J. Smith tiple.

The 1940 Martin Catalog is an example of elegant understatement. In the introduction to the ukulele section, Martin informs the reader that their ukes "are built in eight styles, four of mahogany and four of Hawaiian koa wood." All the descriptions of the ukes are devoid of the more typical hard-sell language except the 5K. At the end of that description it says, "The finest ukulele made"—in 1924 the price of a 5K was $55. Catalog courtesy of the Martin Company.

The Tiple

The ten-string tiple ("tiple" in Spanish means "little guitar") originated in Argentina. Lyon & Healy took credit for introducing this steel-string instrument to America in the mid-twenties. In their 1925 catalog, Lyon & Healy promoted the tiple (pronounced *tip-lay* not *tip-ull*) in this way: "The tiple will appeal immediately to the advanced ukulele player. It enables him to play an entirely new instrument and with his knowledge of ukulele chords he can at once secure tonal effects of rare beauty and richness." There were two A strings (one regular, one an octave down), three D and F# strings (two regular with the middle one an octave lower), and two unison B's on the top. As a result, any uke player could play the tiple and get a very rich, full sound. The Martin tiple was designed in 1920 around an original brought back from Argentina by William J. Smith. This original used gut strings and was tuned like the top four strings of a guitar. Smith, who had his own music store in New YorkCity, suggested to Martin that they make their own version. Martin reduced the body size, replaced the original gut strings with steel and tuned the instrument up to uke tuning.



"...After the first desultory 'drumming' on one of the ordinary 'Ukes' is over, there comes to every player a desire to own a better instrument... It remained for Gibson to develop a Ukulele of this type, embodying the features of beauty, richness of tone, sturdy construction and true scale." So read some of the "purple" copy in Gibson's 1927 catalog of "Mandolins, Guitars & Ukuleles." As for the Style Uke-3, the catalog states, "No finer ukulele has ever been offered than this Gibson with its deep, rich mahogany finish." We also learn about the "sound-hole inlaid with purfling that harmonizes with the finish; rosewood finger-board bound in white and inlaid with fancy pearl ornaments; seventeen nickel-silver frets; pearl ornaments in peghead, with 'The Gibson' in beautiful silver." In 1927, The Style 3 was priced at $20. The Style Uke-2 "embodies the same tonal qualities as No. 3," but "some of the decorative refinements have been left off to decrease the cost"—exactly five dollars worth. For ten dollars you could buy Style Uke-1, which was the stripped-down model.

Gibson—Styles 1, 3, 2.

Gibson is another famous Mainland musical instrument maker that made fine ukuleles. Begun in 1894 as Orville Gibson's one-man workshop, by 1902 the Gibson Mandolin—Guitar Manufacturing Company, Limited of Kalamazoo, Michigan had 13 employees. While Gibson is best known for its acoustic and electric guitars, mandolins, and banjos, the company started making ukes in 1927 and also made a few ukulele banjos or banjo-ukes.

Gibson's Ukulele Styles 1, 2, and 3 differed in

ornamentation and fretboard length, with the Style 3 being the fanciest and having the longest fretboard. (Gibson also made ukuleles under the Recording King name.) In 1994, Gibson celebrated its 100th anniversary and continues to make fine musical instruments. Unfortunately, the Gibson ukulele line has been discontinued.

LEFT:
GIBSON BANJO UKE

RIGHT:
CIRCA 1931 GIBSON
"FLORENTINE" UKE.
COURTESY OF
STAN WERBIN
OF ELDERLY INSTRUMENTS.

The Chicago Connection

LYON & HEALY

Chicago was the home of a number of major musical instrument companies, many of whom made ukuleles. One of them was LYON & HEALY, who introduced the WASHBURN line in 1883. In addition to setting themselves up to mass produce their instruments (as opposed to Martin and Gibson, who emphasized hand crafting), Lyon & Healy also took credit for inventing the tenor guitar and bringing the tiple from South America to the U.S.

Lyon & Healy originally opened in 1864 as the Chicago branch of the Oliver Ditson Co., a major Boston-based musical instrument retailer. As retailers, Lyon & Healy offered the Kumalae and Nunes lines of ukuleles. In 1916, Lyon & Healy advertised Nunes ukuleles by saying they were "the favorite of college men and women everywhere...the most popular instrument of the day...and the fad of the hour."

As manufacturers, they offered a number of Washburn ukes and taropatches. In their 1923 catalog, five styles of ukes (three in koa) were offered. Later, they created their equivalent of the Martin 5K with the introduction of the famed koa Model 5320 Super Deluxe. This extra-fancy model featured binding front and back, a bound ebony fingerboard, and pearl inlay around the soundhole and in the fingerboard and headstock.

Top: Bell Tiple,
Far left: "Camp" uke,
right: "Bell" uke,
Detail of "Camp" uke.

One unusual Washburn uke offered from the mid-twenties to the mid-thirties was the Shrine Model (Models 5330 and 5331). For a much shorter time, the Bell Ukulele (No. 5325) was also produced. The Shrine was shaped like a balalaika and the Bell, of course, was bell-shaped. Also in the twenties and thirties, Washburn made both plain and fancy tenor ukes as well as tiples. For a short while, they even made the Bell Tiple (No. 5395).

In 1928 Lyon & Healy decided that its future was in retailing. As a result, all of the machinery and the rights to manufacture the Washburn line were sold to J. R. Stewart Co., another Chicago manufacturer. Three years earlier, the Stewart Co. had started making ukuleles and achieved success with its line of LeDomino ukes, featuring dominoes stenciled on the front of the instruments.

Lyon & Healy: "Shrine" ukulele, "De Luxe Model," "Venetian Uke." According to their 1925 catalog, the "Bell" uke was "a new departure in ukulele design, originated by Lyon & Healy. The unique shape appeals immediately to the purchaser who is seeking the novel and individual." The same could also be said for a number of oddly-shaped instruments that Lyon & Healy manufactured. Featured in the same catalog were the teardrop-shaped "Venetian Uke," and in 1927 Lyon & Healy introduced the "Shrine" line of guitars and ukes. The "Camp Uke" line was designed for outdoor use and, according to the catalog, was particularly good for the "none-too-careful treatment young folks are bound to give them." Illustrations showed Camp ukes being enjoyed on the beach, in a canoe and around the "camp" fire. The "De Luxe Model" was Lyon & Healy's fanciest uke, which in 1925 cost $25.

The Great Depression Hits

Unfortunately, the Stewart Co. had invested heavily in a new factory just prior to the stock market crash in October '29. When the Depression hit, they had no choice but to put the company up for sale. At auction, Tonk Bros., a very successful Chicago-based wholesaler, bought the Washburn, Stewart and LeDomino trade names for a fraction of their pre-crash value. Tonk Bros. retained the Washburn brand and sold the Stewart and LeDomino names to another major Chicago manufacturer, the Regal Musical Instrument Co.

Established in 1908, the Regal Musical Instrument Co. made many inexpensive ukuleles throughout the twenties. Many of these were novelty instruments that featured cartoon characters and stenciled designs. In the thirties, Regal licensed the

REGA

rights to manufacture and sell the Dobro brand, which included guitars, banjos and ukuleles.

An interesting sidebar to the Chicago guitar manufacturers' story is that, despite the competition, the various factories often built instruments for each other. For example, in the thirties, some of the later Washburn instruments were made by Regal. In 1954 Regal sold its manufacturing and trade names to yet another big Chicago manufacturer, Harmony.

FAR LEFT AND RIGHT: HAROLD TEEN—YELLOW AND HAROLD TEEN—GREEN UKES.

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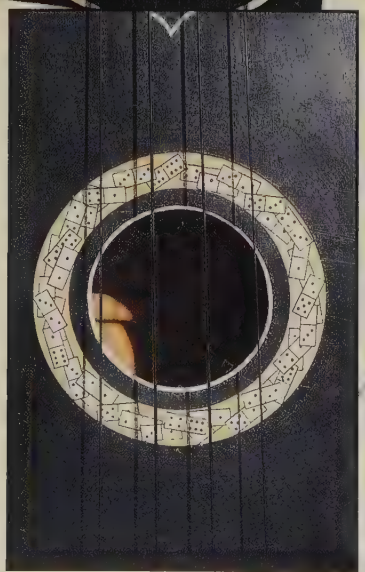
RIGHT: WENDELL HALL "TV" UKE.

Above: Character details from Harold Teen uke sit atop Regal Dobro.

WHOOPE



LEFT: DETAILS — "LEDOMINO" UKE

REGAL

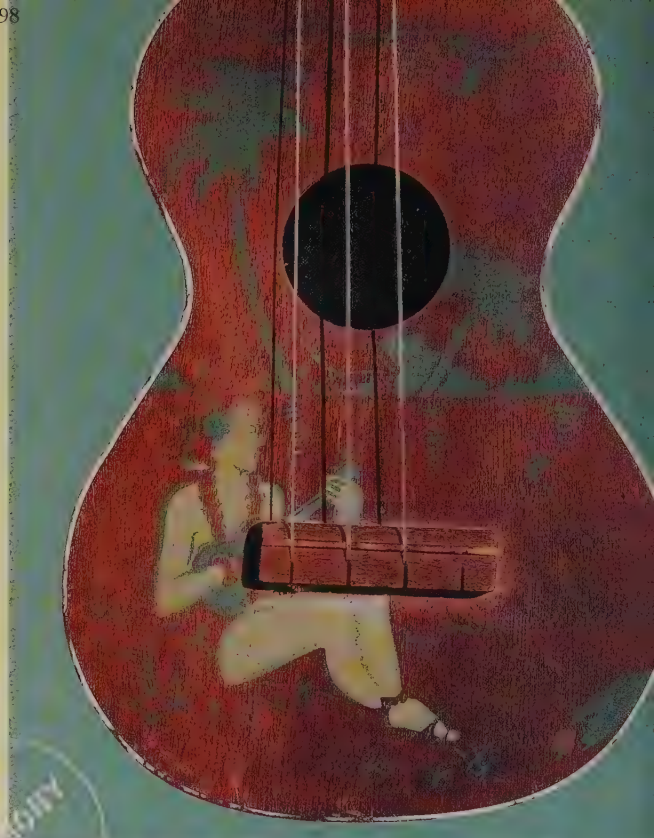
HARMONY

Begun in the late 1800s by Wilhelm J. F. Schultz, THE HARMONY CO. of Chicago had 125 employees by 1915 and was generating $250,000 in sales, mostly from guitars. After the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition, however, the ukulele exploded, and Harmony was the first large-scale manufacturer to jump into the uke business. In 1916 Sears & Roebuck bought Harmony, in an effort to acquire their uke production capability. By 1923, Harmony was producing a quarter of a million instruments per year, many of them ukes and banjo-ukes.

Another ukulele milestone occurred in 1928 when Harmony introduced its Roy Smeck Vita series of guitars and ukes, which featured pear-shaped bodies and seal-shaped soundholes. Johnny Marvin was another player who had his signature uke produced by Harmony. (See Chapter 2, *The Great Players and Personalities*). Other ukulele trade names made by Harmony included Stella, Supertone and Silvertone.

In 1941, Sears sold Harmony to a group of twelve employees who took the company to even greater heights. Much of their business came from manufacturing instruments with the trade names of dozens of other wholesalers, distributors and catalogue houses. At its peak in the mid sixties, Harmony had 600 employees and was making half of the country's guitars and three-quarters of all the ukuleles. Finally, due to increased competition from overseas, Harmony was liquidated in the mid seventies.

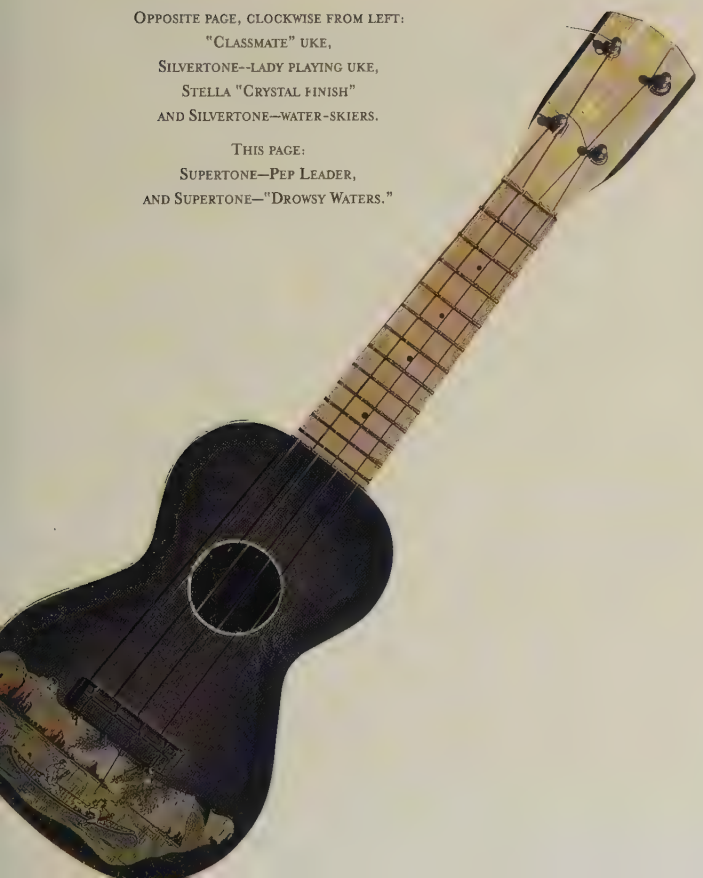
MANDO-SHAPED UKE;
AIRPLANE UKE;
AND GREEN CANOE UKE



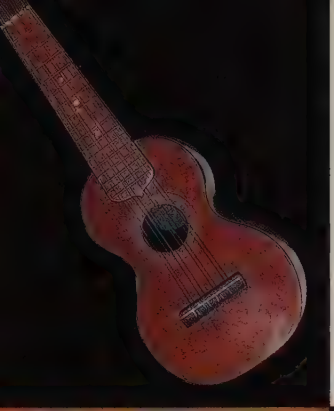
Stella

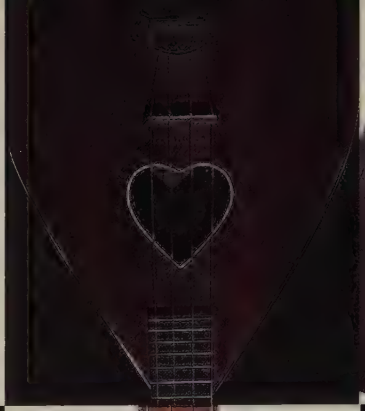
Opposite page, clockwise from left:
"Classmate" uke,
Silvertone--lady playing uke,
Stella "Crystal finish"
and Silvertone—water-skiers.

This page:
Supertone—Pep Leader,
and Supertone—"Drowsy Waters."

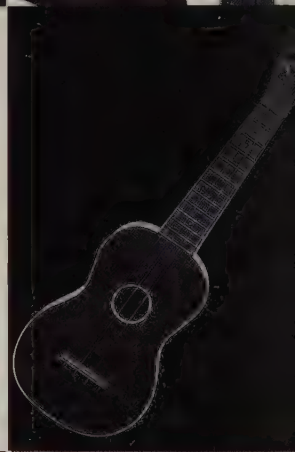


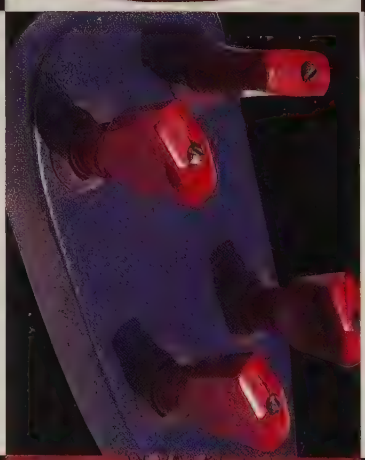
With some notable exceptions (i.e., the Vita and Johnny Marvin ukes), the Regal and Harmony ukes were more novelties than real musical instruments. That's not to say that they were unplayable or that they weren't a good first ukulele, but, at the time, they were created as an inexpensive and fun entry into the uke "craze." In 1932, one prominent catalog was selling many of these ukes for as little as $1.70. In the same catalog, the "Harold Teen" uke was $4.50 and the "Cheer Leader" was $4. In an ironic twist, many of today's uke collectors find these goofy ukes to be particularly attractive. To find an "Art Moderne" or "Jungle Uke" in good condition is sometimes more exciting than finding a much more "playable" Martin. The prices, too, for these unique instruments can be many, many times their original cost. Perhaps because they were so inexpensive, few buyers at the time worried very much about keeping them long term. This is why, despite the enormous number made, they are hard to come by nowadays.

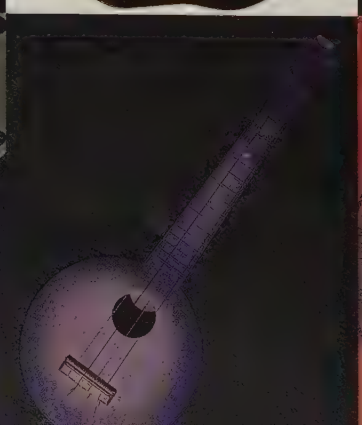


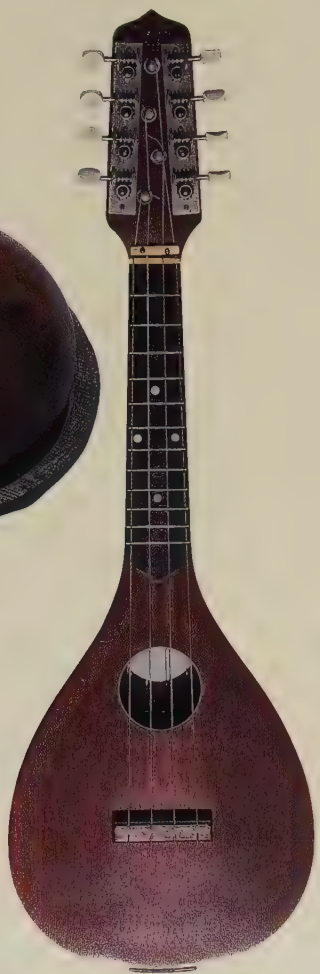


Surgerty

Wabash




Genuine




Quite a few of the ukes pictured here are either the sole uke offering of a manufacturer or were made by an unidentifiable member of the "Chicago" family of instrument makers. There is something about the ukulele that inspired many instrument makers to experiment with their designs.

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Left to right from top row: S. S. Stewart taropatch, S. S. Stewart "mini" uke, Heart-shaped, Northern, "Surf-A-Lele"; Swagerty logo, Richter, Wabash, Bacon uke; Bruno, J. C. Cowle—5-string, Gretsch—blue round detail, "It" uke; P'Mico "7-11" Lucky Uke, Gretsch—blue round, Detail "Non-Pareil" uke, Del Vecchio made in São Paulo, Brazil.

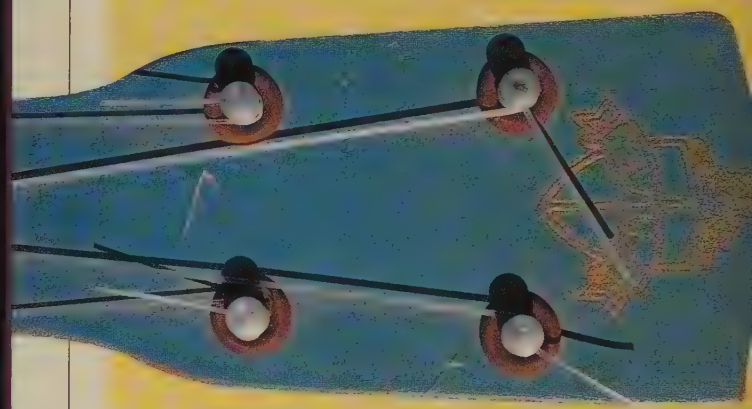
Clockwise from left: cocolele, Turturro "Turnover" mando-uke, Knutsen harp-uke, Turturro "Peanut" uke, "Surf-A-Lele" detail.

The Ukelin

On occasion, this very strange instrument shows up at local flea markets. Patented in 1926, the ukelin was a cross between a violin and a ukulele. It was played on the lap by plucking the zither-like strings with one hand, while bowing a completely different set of strings with the other. The sole manufacturer of the ukelin was the INTERNATIONAL MUSICAL CORPORATION of Hoboken, New Jersey. They discontinued making the ukelin in 1963.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL SYPHERS.

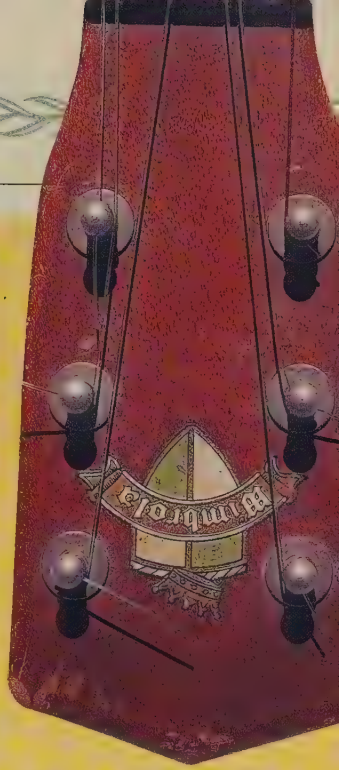
ONE FRO



The FAVILLA GUITAR CO. began in Brooklyn, New York, in 1890. Started by Italian émigrés John and Joseph Favilla, Favilla Guitars also made its share of ukes. In addition to making standard-sized ukes,

RIGHT: THREE FAVILLA TEARDROP UKULELES. THE WIMBROLA—A SIX-STRING, 9-SIDED ODDITY—WAS DESIGNED BY COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM RADIO STAR, DALE WIMBROW IN THE EARLY THIRTIES, WEISSENBORN—UKULELE, HOLLYWOOD—PEARSON, THREE CONCERT UKES AND A MINI-UKE.

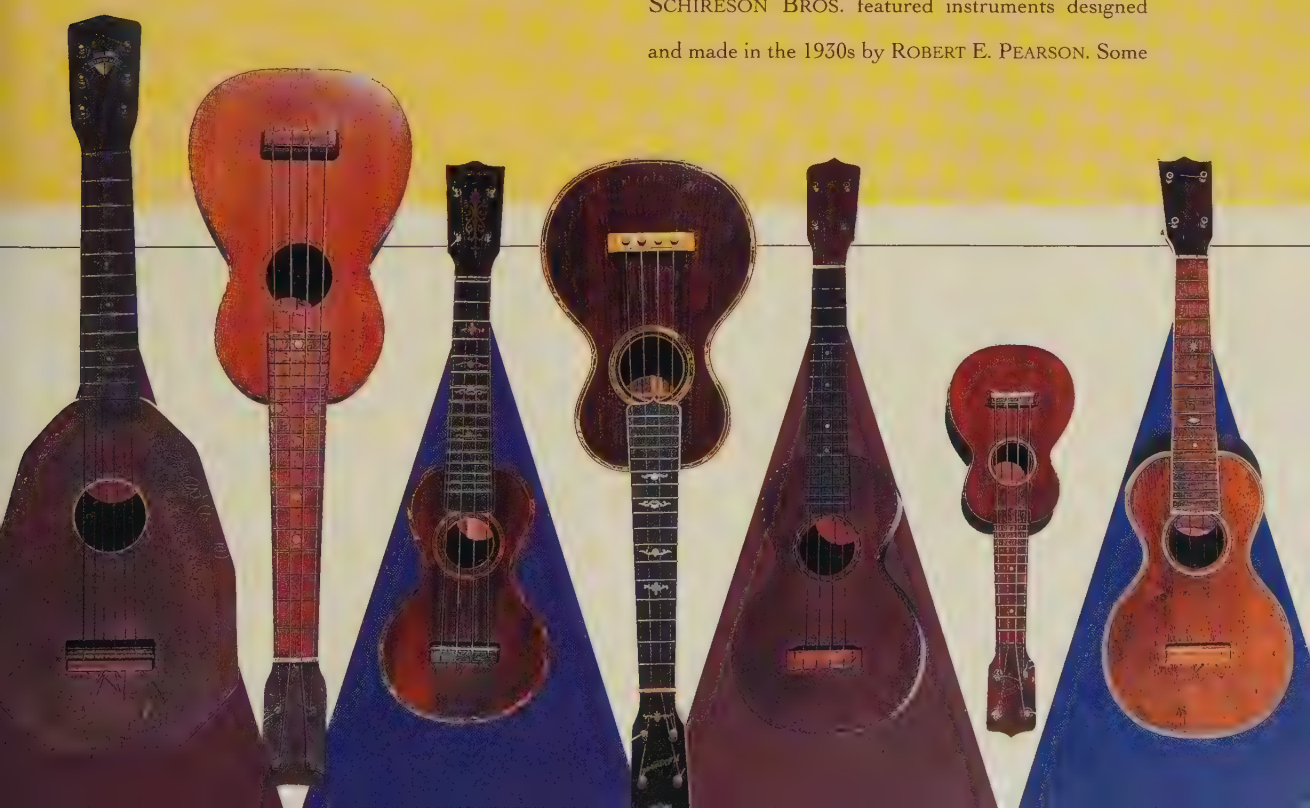
Brooklyn, Two From L.A.



Favilla also brought out their tear-shaped uke in a variety of colors. These ukes, like all Favilla instruments, always featured the family crest on the headstock. Herk (Hercules) Favilla, John Favilla's son, was a vaudeville performer who also worked at the factory. In 1951, Herk published a method book for the baritone uke (which Favilla was producing at the time) and in 1959 he took over the company. Due to rising costs, Favilla closed in 1973.

Hermann C. Weissenborn emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1902, and settled in Los Angeles in 1910. Weissenborn did mostly violin and piano repair work through the 'teens; however, by the twenties he had jumped into the Hawaiian craze and was contributing his own lap steel guitars, guitars and ukes. The uke pictured below is a concert-sized uke. Like most Weissenborn instruments, it includes a branded shield on the wood, which can be seen through the soundhole, that says "H. Weissenborn, Los Angeles, Cal."

Schireson Bros. featured instruments designed and made in the 1930s by Robert E. Pearson. Some



of his Hollywood ukuleles featured particularly fancy trim. Schireson also made a signature uke for Ray Canfield, a California-based performer, teacher and arranger. When Canfield arranged sheet music for uke, a logo of a ukulele appeared on the cover stating, "This copy contains a 'Ray Canfield' Symphonic Uke Arrangement."

FROM TOP:
DETAIL HOLLYWOOD UKE,
RAY CANFIELD LOGO-
(FROM "SAILIN' ON"), "RAY
CANFIELD" UKE.

THE METAL UKE

Some of the most remarkable ukuleles ever manufactured were made by the NATIONAL CO. Begun in 1925, the National String Instrument Corporation was formed by musician and inventor John Dopyera, a Czechoslovakian immigrant, with musician and vaudeville entertainer George Beauchamp (pronounced Bee-chum). Their idea was to make all-metal guitars, mandolins and ukuleles with resonators that would help make the instrument louder. At the time, ten years prior to the invention of the electric guitar, the acoustic guitar had a difficult time competing in volume with the other instruments in a typical vaudeville orchestra.

As a result of Beauchamp's interest in a louder guitar, Dopyera experimented with a variety of different aluminum alloys until he created the all-metal German-silver (or nickel silver—an alloy of copper, zinc and nickel) Hawaiian guitar. As for volume, Dopyera claimed it was seven times louder than a standard guitar. Due to a bitter dispute between Dopyera and Beauchamp over credit for the invention of the National guitar, Dopyera left the company in 1929 and proceeded to found the DOBRO COMPANY that same year—the five letters in the name Dobro refer to the five Dopyera Brothers, all of whom were involved in the business. The Dobro was another resonator-type instrument but designed around a convex rather a concave resonator.

Eventually, National ran into financial troubles

NATIONAL—STYLE 2.

and John Dopyera's brother Louis bought up the majority of the stock. On July 1, 1935, Dobro and National merged to form the NATIONAL DOBRO CORP., and in 1936 the newly combined company moved to Chicago. The strategy behind the move was to be near the big distributors and parts makers, as well as the new electronics firms who would provide parts for National Dobro's new venture into electric guitars. When the United States jumped into World War II, all peacetime industries converted to defense work, leading, ultimately, to the end of the National Dobro Corp.

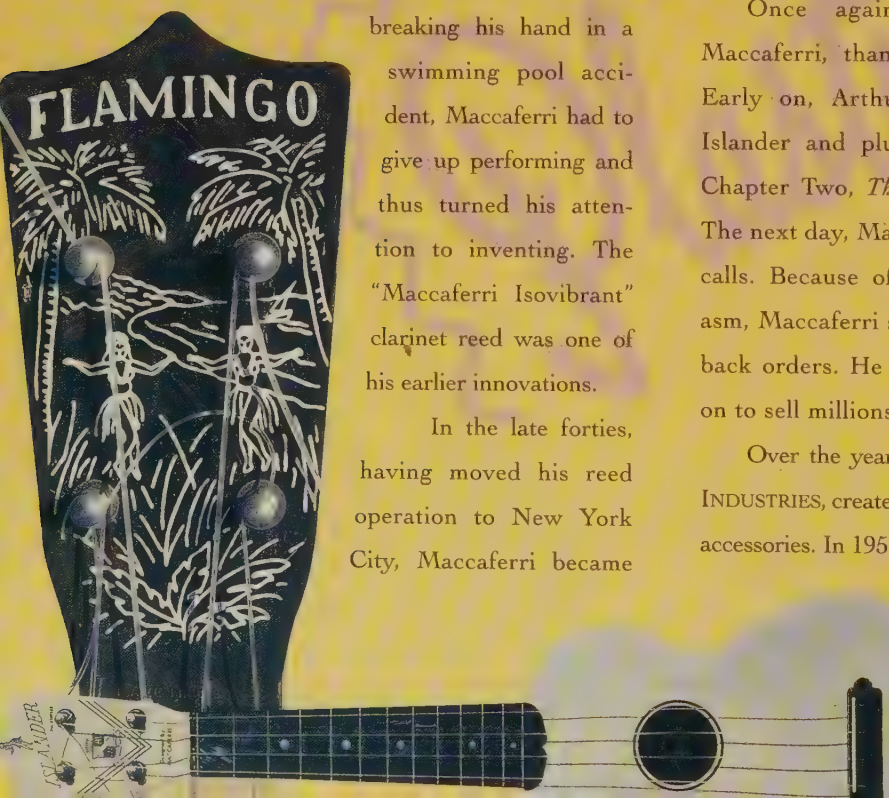
Both National and Dobro made resonator ukuleles, and between 1928 and 1941, National made a large- and small-body uke in a variety of different styles. Styles 1, 2, and 3 featured German-silver bodies with (as the number got higher) ever more elaborate engravings on the front, back and sides. The Style 0 ukes featured Hawaiian designs sandblasted onto the metal body, while the less expensive Triolian line included a brown to yellow sunburst-paint- ed uke with a palm tree stenciled back. The Dobro uke came only in one style with a mahogany body. In 1933, Dobro licensed the Regal Company to make these instruments under the Dobro and Regal trade names.

In 1929, National was offering three different silver ukulele models; the Style 2, featuring engraving on the front, sides and back, sold for $70 at the time.

The Future's in Plastics

Between the years of 1949 and 1969, more than nine million plastic ukuleles were sold. The credit for this goes to a man named Mario Maccaferri. Born in 1900 in northern Italy, Maccaferri began studying guitar at the age of nine. By the age of eleven he had apprenticed himself to Luigi Mozzani, a respected guitarist and luthier. At age twenty-one, Maccaferri had become known as a fine guitarist and was touring professionally throughout Italy.

During the Depression, Maccaferri, then living in Paris, turned to building guitars to supplement his income. It was during this time that he invented what became the Maccaferri-Selmer guitar, popularized by the famed Django Reinhardt. After breaking his hand in a swimming pool accident, Maccaferri had to give up performing and thus turned his attention to inventing. The "Maccaferri Isovibrant" clarinet reed was one of his earlier innovations.



In the late forties, having moved his reed operation to New York City, Maccaferri became intrigued with the potential of plastic. At first, when cane became hard to find during World War II, he found success manufacturing plastic clarinet reeds. Acceptance came quickly thanks to an endorsement from famed clarinetist Benny Goodman. Eager to further his forays into plastic, Maccaferri combined his knowledge of plastics lineage and guitar building and in 1949 introduced the Islander ukulele. Patterned after a Martin Style 0, Maccaferri priced his all-plastic uke at $5.95 (in 1952, due to increased production efficiencies, Maccaferri was able to lower the price 33% to $3.95). Despite its plastic lineage, the Islander was a remarkably good instrument: it was easy to play, easy to tune, and even more remarkably, it had a warm tone.

Once again, good fortune shone on Maccaferri, thanks to a high profile endorser. Early on, Arthur Godfrey got a hold of an Islander and plugged it on his TV show (see Chapter Two, *The Great Players and Personalities*). The next day, Maccaferri was deluged with phone calls. Because of Godfrey's unsolicited enthusiasm, Maccaferri suddenly had more than 150,000 back orders. He managed to fill these, and went on to sell millions of plastic ukes.

Over the years, Maccaferri's company, Mastro Industries, created a variety of different ukes and uke accessories. In 1951, the uke line included the Islander at $5.95, the slightly larger and fancier Islander Deluxe priced at $7.95

and the kid-sized Sparkle Plenty Islander Ukette priced at $2.98 (Sparkle Plenty was the child in the very popular Dick Tracy comic strip). Included with the two larger ukes were a book called *Godfrey The Great: The Life Story of Arthur Godfrey*, a method and songbook by May Singhi Breen and a felt pick. A nifty accessory was something called the Islander Visual Chordmaster, which, when attached to the fretboard, allowed the player to make many of the most basic chords with the push of a button.

In 1953, Maccaferri introduced the Islander Baritone Ukulele priced at $12.95. He also brought out the T.V. Pal at $1.75, which was a lower-cost version of the soprano-sized Islander. In 1965 the Mastro catalog included a full line of ukes, a banjo uke and a banjolele. In 1969, at the age of 69, Maccaferri finally got out of the plastic musical instrument business and sold off most of his molds to Carnival, another plastic novelty maker.

PLASTIC UKES— FLAMINGO BROWN, ISLANDER UKE, FIN-DER UKE, CARNIVAL, ISLANDER. THE "FIN-DER" WAS A PLASTIC UKE CREATED BY GEORGE A. FINDER AND DEVELOPED BY NINO MARCELLI IN 1950. BASED IN SAN DIEGO, FIN-DER INC. OFFERED THIS WEST COAST-INFLUENCED UKE WITH "FIN-DER BEACH BOY GENUINE NYLON, COLORED UKULELE STRINGS." THE FOUR STRING COLORS WERE RED HIBISCUS, BLUE IRIS, GREEN FERN AND ORANGE GINGER.

TOP: "FRISCO UKE"

ABOVE: TENOR UKULELE DESIGNED AND MADE BY DAVID HURD — UKULELES BY KAWIKA, INC.

TODAY'S UKULELE MAKERS

Many of the ukuleles that you find in a typical musical instrument store are inexpensive and were most likely made in Asia. While these ukes are not recommended for serious players, they can serve as a low-cost introduction to the instrument. In addition to Kamaka, there are other makers of fine ukuleles both in Hawaii and on the Mainland.

What follows are a few of the many companies and individual luthiers who are currently building better ukes:

ANAHOLA STRINGED INSTRUMENTS
Box 407
Anahola, Kauai, HI 96703
Custom-made koa guitars and ukuleles.

BELTONA
8 Knowle Rd.
Leeds LS4 2PJ United Kingdom
Specializes in resonator ukes, similar to the National.

H. F. EIBERT STRINGED INSTRUMENTS
4136 Howlett Hills Rd.
Syracuse, NY 13215
Restoration and construction of stringed instruments.

"FRISCO UKE" C/O K&S
2923 Adeline St.
Berkeley, CA 94703
Specializes in a concert-sized pear-shaped uke.

TONY GRAZIANO UKULELES
1016 Seabright Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA. 95062
Makes all sizes, but specializes in tenor and baritone ukes.

KOALOHA
c/o Roy Sakuma Productions
3555 Harding Avenue
Honolulu, HI 96816
Fine, hand-crafted ukuleles.

MAUI MUSIC
Box 11501
Lahaina, Maui, HI 96761
Currently manufactures over 1500 ukuleles a year—all sizes and styles.

NATIONAL RESO-PHONIC GUITARS
871 Via Esteban #C
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
Replicas of the original National metal ukes are being manufactured.

PEGASUS GUITARS & UKULELES
45 Pohaku St.
Hilo, HI 96720
Specializes in custom-made ukuleles and guitars.

POHAKU UKULELES
665 Ulukahiki Street
Kailua, HI 96734
Specializes in tenor ukuleles.

SONNY D. UKULELES
94-164 Awalu Street, Room E
Waipahu, HI 96797
All sizes and custom ukuleles.

BRIAN STAPLETON
21B Broad Street
Lyme Regis, Dorset, U.K. DT73QE
Maker and restorer of stringed instruments.

TALINA BANJO-UKES
815 Chadbury Lane
Seabrook, TX 77586
All-wood banjo-ukes.

UK UKES
Gilead
New Wells
Near Abermule
Montgomeryshire, Wales, U.K. SY156JJ
All-koa Hawaiian instruments.

UKULELES BY KAWIKA, INC.
1626 Kino'ole Street,
Hilo, HI 96720-5021
Specializing in concert, baritone and 4-, 6- and 8-string tenor ukes.

These manufacturers are testament to a healthy and growing contemporary uke market. While nowhere near as large as it was during the Hawaiian craze of the 'teens and twenties or the Godfrey years, today's market is filled with uke fans who are there for the long haul.

Any serious discussion of the ukulele naturally leads to a prediction of a "comeback." The problem with a "comeback" is that, like any fad, it can go away just as quickly. Perhaps the best one can hope for is a growing public recognition of the qualities that have made the ukulele popular since 1879: It is a small, portable instrument that is easy to learn, and yet allows for virtuosity. And, perhaps more than any other musical instrument, the ukulele can bring a smile to almost anyone.

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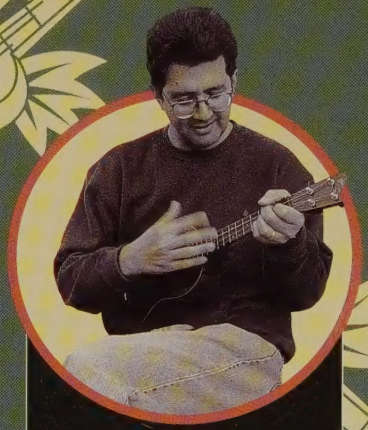
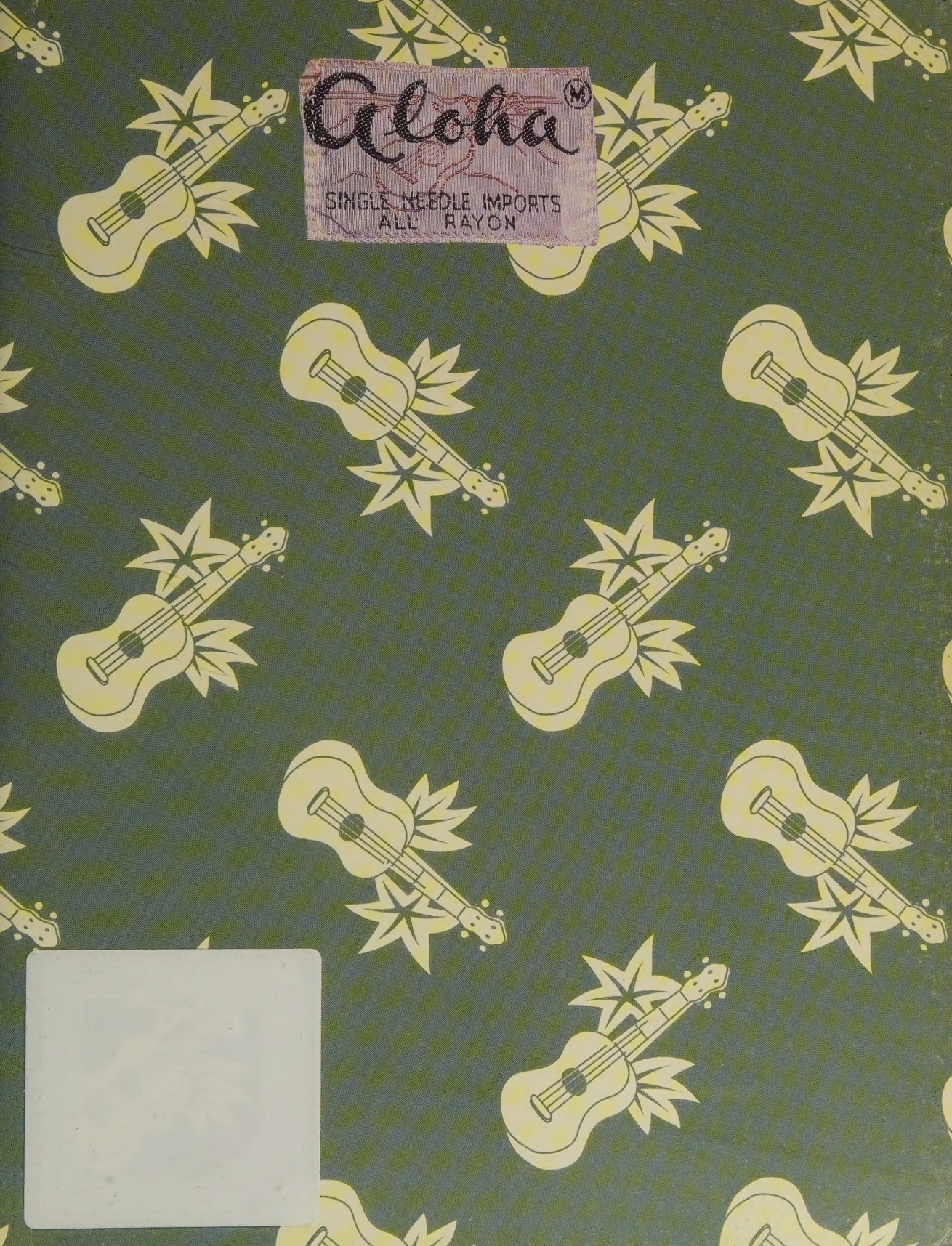


JIM BELOFF

Jim Beloff is the author, compiler and publisher of three songbooks for the ukulele and a CD of original songs performed on the ukulele. Jim regularly scours the flea markets of Southern California looking for ukuleles and related memorabilia. When he isn't playing the uke, Jim is the Associate Publisher of *Billboard Magazine*. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife Liz, corgi (with fleas) Barney, and more ukuleles than he cares to admit.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